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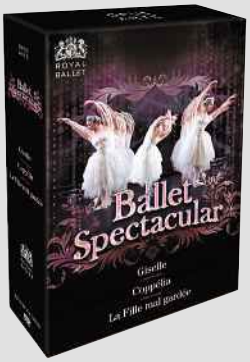

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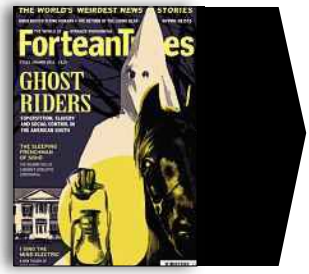

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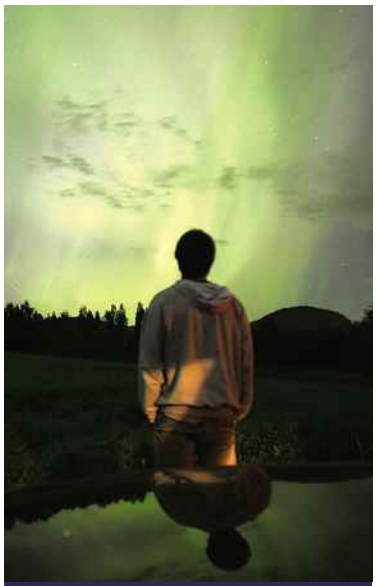

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editorial

Recalibrating your weird meter

A new novel from one of *Fortean Times*'s most avid readers, William Gibson (WG), is always an event to be savoured. How gratifying, then, to find that *FT* is namechecked within the pages of *The Peripheral*, and to hear its author say that he "can't recommend *FT* too highly" and that the magazine helps him "recalibrate my yardstick of weirdness".

These comments come in an interview with WG conducted by another of our readers, Rick Kleffel (RK), in his online SF blog 'The Agony Column' on Bookotron.com (22 Nov 2014) – in which they discuss Gibson's highly acclaimed latest. Here's a taster:

RK: You talked about recalibrating your weird meter … I think one of your favourite tools for this is the *Fortean Times*, the world's greatest magazine …

WG: (laughs enthusiastically) Yes!

RK: … and you make a couple of nods to that in the book… I was very happy to see a thylacine show up!

WG: Yes, I've been a *Fortean Times* reader probably for longer than I've been publishing science fiction. I don't think I've ever missed an issue. I think it's actually the last print magazine that I still go to the newstand every month and buy. There's no better way to keep up with the weird.

RK: What I like about *Fortean Times* is that it presents everything that people say without trying to make a judgement as to whether or not there's a reality behind that phenomenon … it's just that this is what people are saying they've seen… and that, of itself, is definitely weird.

WG: Yes, they will come down editorially, over a considerable period of time, on one side or another, with a hypothesis of what's going on… like, a decade ago, at least, they began to say that the extraterrestrial hypothesis of UFOs was a purely cultural, psychological phenomenon, with no extraterrestrial basis. So they've got opinions, although they'll very happily tell you what somebody who is flagrantly of the opposite disposition is saying – particularly if it's amusing.

RK: That's one of the virtues of *Fortean Times*… it's just fun to read. Some of that sense of the weird really ripples through *The Peripheral* in an effective manner.

Thanks guys! If *FT* readers would like to hear the whole interview – which contains some fascinating insights into the genesis of WG's new novel – then go visit The Agony Column blog at: http://bookotron.com/agony/news/2014/11-17-14-podcast.htm#podcast1122141. *The Peripheral* is published by Viking.

FT WEBSITE UPDATE

Sadly, the old *Fortean Times* website is no more. Anyone going to www.forteantimes.com will no longer see the familiar – if usually out of date – landing page. The casualty of a lack of advertising revenue and a subsequent shake-up by our publisher, the *FT* site is now a user-friendly place to manage your print or digital subscription, but has lost the masses of content that used to be available to visitors. As we go to press, we are simply unable to add new material to the site for technical reasons, but hopefully by the time you read these words we will be able to post stories to the blog section of the site and have seen the return of the daily news updates – the thing that dedicated weird-watchers seem to be missing the most, if your emails are anything to go by.

The good news is that the long-running *FT* message boards have been saved – and not only saved, but, say users, massively improved in terms of functionality. These forums have always been a great place to get together online with fellow forteans to discuss everything from articles in the new issue of *FT* and stories in the mainstream media to the latest conspiracy theories or Bigfoot sightings. So, head along to http://forum.forteantimes.com/index.php, where you're sure to find a warm welcome and fortean discussion galore.

You can also visit the *FT* Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ForteanTimes) for the latest on the mag, or follow us on Twitter (@forteantimes) for news and updates.

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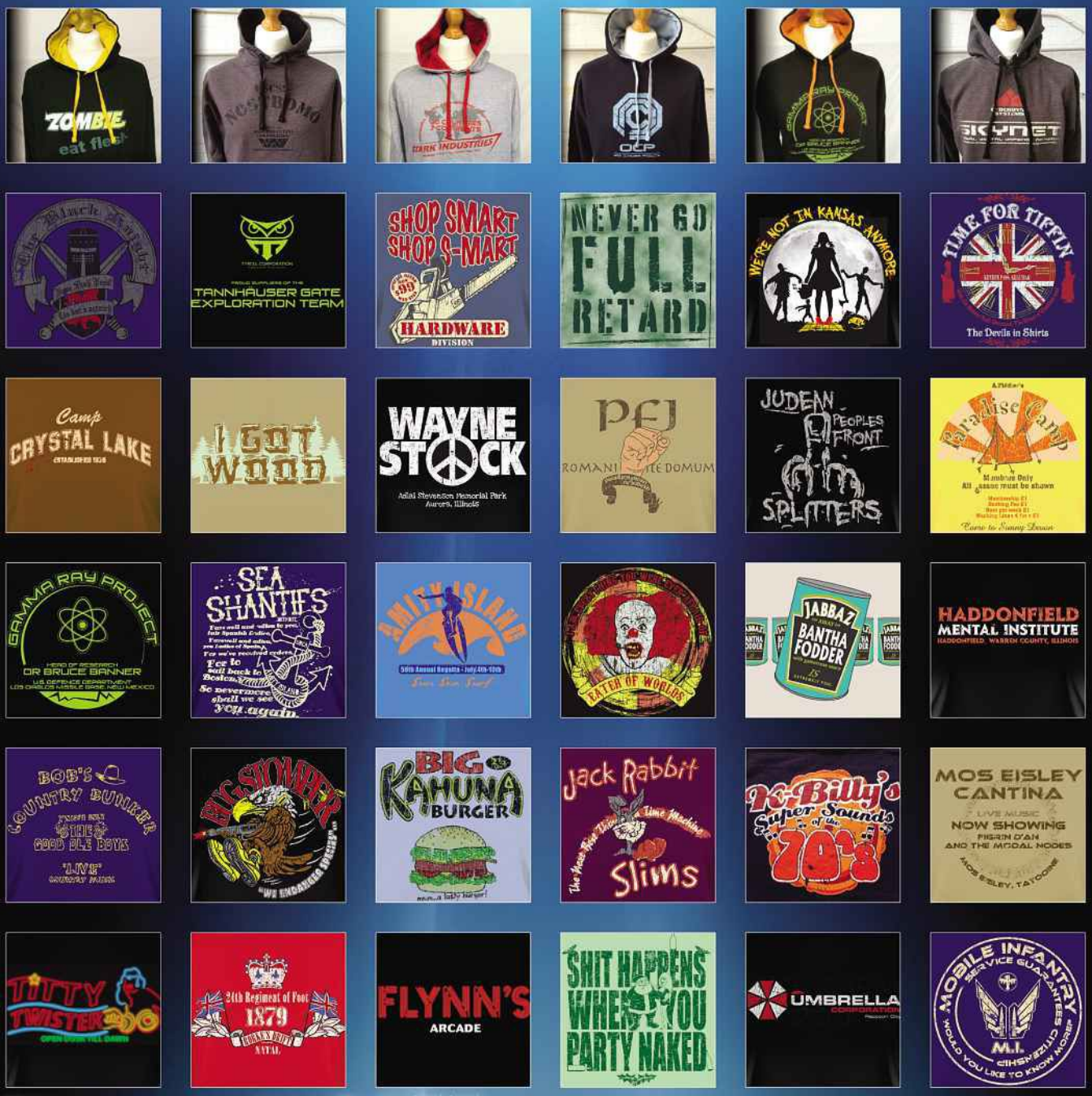

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strangedays

Mysterious big bang theories

A series of unexplained booms rattles windows, and people, from North Yorkshire to New York

Thousands of people right across Britain reported hearing a series of loud bangs in the sky around 10.30pm on Saturday, 29 November, shaking windows and scaring pets. Many described them as sounding like explosions or thunder, while others thought they were similar to sonic booms (made by aircraft passing through the sound barrier). Such booms were heard in Kent earlier in November, when two RAF jets intercepted a Latvian cargo plane. Britain has been on its second-highest terrorism threat level – 'severe' – since August. However, the Ministry of Defence said that no jets were scrambled on the Saturday in question. Calum MacColl at the Met Office said: "It definitely wasn't meteorological". Some said the bangs sounded more like a series of loud crackling pops, and so suspected fireworks; however, when they looked outside, none were to be seen. Oddest of all, a loud bang was heard in Buffalo, New York, around the same time.

Social media naturally went into overdrive. Many attention-seekers falsely reported hearing the noises; others innocently reported similar noises they heard at the same time for which there will be mundane explanations – such as military training or, indeed, fireworks. Claudia Angiletta, 27, recorded the bangs from her house in Croydon, south London. "I couldn't hear the [TV] programme due to the loud noises. It went on for ages. I went out to look for fireworks but I couldn't see anything. That's when I recorded the clip." She said her family, who live seven miles (11km) away in Norbury, also heard the sounds. However, it turned out that, at around the same time, there *was* a large and very loud fireworks display for a wedding party at the Walcountians Sports Club, four miles (6.4km) from the centre of Croydon. It was a still night, and the sound would have easily carried for miles… though obviously not as far as Bedfordshire, Glasgow, North Devon, and Leicestershire – let alone New York.

ENSIGN JOHN GAY / NASA

Just to complicate the situation, 19 hours earlier, at 3am on Saturday, at least eight staff at Catterick Army Barracks in North Yorkshire reported an explosion, leading the police to close off a six-mile (10km) stretch of the A1 motorway for 12 hours while they searched for the site of the blast. "A number of aging detonators" were found near the perimeter fence, but these were not the cause of the reported explosion. And five days earlier, at 10.25pm on 24 November, hundreds of people across Greater Manchester, from Eccles to Rusholme, reported hearing a massive explosion and experiencing disturbances to television and mobile phone networks. No evidence of a fire or any other disturbance could be found.

The finger was pointed at a hypersonic spy aircraft…

Somebody writing a blog called The End Time, commented: "I believe the booms are manifestations of spiritual warfare we happen to hear on this side of the veil or the preparations God is making for imminent tribulation judgments." Thousands used the Twitter hashtag #OMGWeAreAllGoingToDie to report the bangs, though often only in jest. Others dragged in space aliens to account for the bangs. Dr Bhupendra Khandelwal, a scientist at Sheffield University working on so-called 'pulse detonation engines', pointed the finger of blame at ultra-top secret American hypersonic spy aircraft using such engines to reach five times the speed of sound – but given the increasingly sophisticated satellite system, there seems little point for fearsomely fast (and expensive) manned aircraft. Anyway, why develop an aeroplane quite so absurdly noisy?

Maybe the sounds were made by a fireball – a meteor burning up as it entered the atmosphere above Britain. The larger the meteor, the bigger the sound. When a large meteor hit the ground near the village of Wold Newton in the East Riding of Yorkshire in December 1795, a Mr L Wilson said: "I heard noises in the air like the report of cannon at a distance," while Charles Preston, 11, described the sound as being like "the noise as of firing of cannon, heard at the above time a hissing in the air". Many local inhabitants thought the repeated noises were "guns at sea".

Witnesses of other meteorite falls have recorded hearing similar sounds. "A noise like thunder or the rolling of drums broke overhead, followed by a whizzing noise or the sound of escaping steam," said one. If the bangs of 29 November were made by a meteor and it landed in the UK, then somewhere there is going to be a very large crater – unless it landed in the sea. Sceptics of the meteoric explanation point out that no airline pilots reported any bright lights as they flew above the cloud cover.

And what about that bang across the Pond in Buffalo? Maybe that was just a 'coincidence'… *manchestereveningnews.co.uk, 24 Nov; BBC News, 25 Nov; D.Mirror, 30 Nov; D.Mail, 1+2 Dec 2014.*

HYPNOTIC HEIST
The criminal conjuror who robbed a London shopkeeper
PAGE 9

GOODBYE TO ALL THAT
Robert Graves's spooky tale and other ghosts of the Great War
PAGE 18

BACK FROM THE DEAD
The resurrected Polish pensioner and some other lucky stiffs
PAGE 26

The Conspirasphere

Is America's most notorious conspiracy theorist really a supposedly dead comedian? NOEL ROONEY asks: Would the real 'Alex Jones' – erm, stand up?

It all started innocently enough, with an apparent agreement between the, now late, great comedienne Joan Rivers, and the very much alive (but, as we shall see, of seemingly questionable provenance) Alex Jones, the garrulous host of Prison Planet and Infowars, that their comments about Michelle Obama actually being a man were of course – on some serious reflection – a joke.

From that point on, things become a little murky. Somehow, in a process that this writer has come to think of as 'Conspiracy Will Eat Itself', some of the nice people at Before It's News and their friends at the Atlantean Conspiracy websites (among quite a few others) had put two and two together and come up with – Bill Hicks!

GETTY IMAGES

ANGELA DAVIS

You see, the late (and also great) comedian died in 1994 of pancreatic cancer. Well did he now? And the first time anyone ever heard of Alex Jones was in 1997, when he worked with Bill Hicks's friend and cameraman Kevin Booth on a piece about the Waco massacre (sorry, siege); and what was the last thing Bill Hicks worked on before his 'death'? Why, the Waco incident. And who with? Exactly.

So Bill Hicks disappears (as one does when one dies) and Alex Jones appears out of nowhere, talking about the same thing. *And using the same cameraman*. And Alex Jones bears more than a passing resemblance to Bill Hicks. And then some enterprising folks (retired forensics types with too much time on their hands, clearly) went on to compare the teeth of Messrs Hicks and Jones from photographs and discovered that they are similar (in the sinister and significant way that photos taken from different angles of different mouths often are). And more than one perspicuous conspiracist (not a phrase to be uttered when drink has been taken) has noted the eerily similar moles adorning the necks of both luminaries.

So there you have it; Bill Hicks did not die of pancreatic cancer in 1994, but morphed into Alex Jones. And, of course, if you are in really deep, then you are likely to know that Alex Jones is a shill for the Bad Guys, the Illuminati, the New World Order… which is when it all begins to make sense. If you're still thinking "Bill Hicks, dead comedian", you need to get with the programme; we're talking Bill Hicks, CIA agent, here. Obviously.

You see, even though he knew a hell of a lot about what was really going on, Bill Hicks only ever joked about it. And that's what They want you to think; that's it's all a Big Joke. So when he 'died' and went undercover, it made perfect sense for him to reappear as Alex Jones, the Big Joke, the big shill, and continue to deflect us from the things that really matter, such as the simply uncanny resemblance between Prince Philip and a monitor lizard, and how Lady Gaga fills her videos with Illuminati symbolism (an interesting substitute for musical talent).

And the First Lady? Well, she's a lady; we knew that all along.

http://beforeitsnews.com/conspiracy-theories/2014/09/irrefutable-proof-that-bill-hicks-was-resurrected-by-the-cia-as-alex-jones-2465122.html; www.atlanteanconspiracy.com/2013/02/alex-jones-is-bill-hicks.html

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Duchess suffers hotbox at Ferryhill

Heritage Railway, 8 May–4 June 2014.

The 60-ton whale that turned into a ticking time bomb

Independent, 3 May 2014.

Blue Jays having devil of a time with Angels

Toronto Star, 12 May 2014.

City down as season of floats gives rise to to fears of a bubble

(London) Eve.Standard, 11 April 2014.

Great Danes reclaim top spot in restaurant Oscars

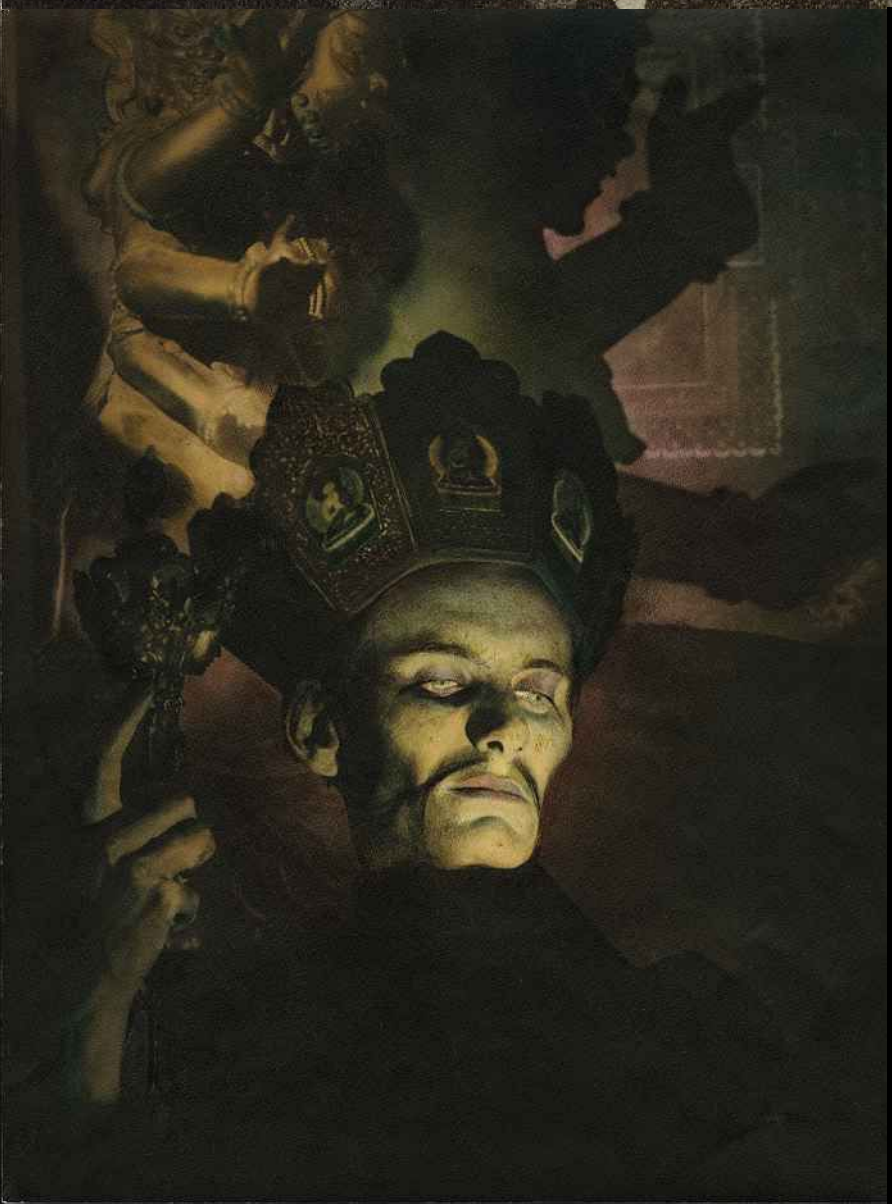
Irish Times, 29 April 2014.

Lions share their funds

Valley News (South Wiltshire & North Dorset), May 2014.

Inflatable whale too 'religious'

Alive! (Dublin Catholic monthly), May 2014.



American Grotesque

William Mortensen is the great forgotten pioneer of American photography: a master technician and maverick visionary whose embrace of Romantic pictorialism and subject matter that tended toward the dark, erotic and outré served to isolate him from his peers and banish him from the growing realist hegenomy of 'straight' photography. He brought Fay Wray to Hollywood, worked as a set designer for Cecil B DeMille and Tod Browning and, through the 1930s, was a hugely successful Hollywood photographer, shooting stars from Valentino to Peter Lorre. Always fascinated by the occult, Mortensen spent years working on a planned "Pictorial History of Witchcraft and Demonology", which he described as a "very fruitful field for grotesque art... Fear, secrecy, and converse with evil powers, were characteristic elements of this mysterious cult which is as old as man. These elements are of the very substance of the grotesque... but little has been done with it by photographers". Indeed, Mortensen was described as "the antichrist" by 'straight' photographer Ansel Adams and loathed by his influential Group f/64 coterie. Recently, the tide has perhaps begun to turn, with the publication of the first book-length survey of his work and major exhibitions around the US.

Clockwise from top:

"Off for the Sabbot", c. 1927 (Hereward Carrington Estate)

"A Tibetan Priest" (aka "Tantric Sorcerer"), silver gelatin print, c. 1932 (Dennis Reed collection)

"Untitled" (staked witch scene), silver gelatin print, c. 1927 (Hereward Carrington Estate)

American Grotesque: The Life and Art of William Mortensen, edited by Larry Lytle and Michael Moynihan, is published by Feral House, priced £32.50.

SIDELINES...

SPOOKY MYSTERY

Ghost-hunter Robert Laursen, 37, stabbed himself in the chest while staying overnight in an allegedly haunted house in Iowa. Airlifted to hospital, he remained in a critical condition. Josiah and Sarah Moore, their four children and two other children were axed to death in the house in 1912. The crime was never solved. *Sun, 10 Nov 2014*.

SHC PREVENTED

Luang Pu Pim, 65, abbot of Thailand's Wat Weruwan temple, was interred in a wooden coffin (with air holes) on 9 September after telling his followers that he was going to meditate himself to death in two days, whereupon his body and the coffin would spontaneously combust. Local authorities and senior Buddhists intervened and rescued the exhausted monk. His daughter revealed that he had once died in a cave but was brought back to life by a miracle. *International Business Times, 11 Sept 2014.*

BULLSEYE!

Colorado pilot Brian Veatch, 52, lost power while towing an advertising banner in his single-engine Piper Pawnee and crashed into a suburban Denver house that he once owned. Police said it appeared to be a mere coincidence. He walked away unhurt. *<i> 8 May 2014.*

MARTIN ROSS

Gutta-percha flotsam

Javanese rubbery blocks wash up in Europe after a century

In the summer of 2012, Tracey Williams was walking her dog along a beach near her home in Newquay, Cornwall, when she spotted a black tablet on the sand, made of something resembling rubber. It looked like a large chopping board with the word 'Tjipetir' engraved on it. Weeks later, she found another on a different beach alongside bales of rubber, washed up in a cove. Doing some research, she discovered that these blocks had been appearing on beaches across northern Europe.

LEFT: One of the tablets that have landed on European beaches.

Tjipetir turned out to be the name of a rubber plantation in West Java, Indonesia, which operated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The blocks were not strictly rubber, but a latex material known as gutta-percha, the gum of a tree found in the Malay Peninsula and Malaysia, used in the 19th and early 20th centuries to insulate telegraph cables on the seabed. Before plastic became widespread, gutta-percha was also used to make such items as golf balls, teddy bear noses, picture frames and jewellery.

Williams began charting her progress on Facebook, which led to many people coming forward to reveal their own gutta-percha beach finds. These were not only around England and Wales but also in Shetland, the Channel Islands, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Along with these blocks, bales and rolls of rubber are also being washed up. The French film-maker Nina Barbier made a short documentary showing the blocks washing ashore in the Netherlands.

There has been speculation that the gutta-percha could be coming from the wreck of the *Titanic*, which had indeed been carrying gutta-percha and bales of rubber. Then, in the summer of 2013, Williams was contacted separately by two people, neither of whom wished to be named, who both pinpointed the same wreck as the source. They knew of a salvage company carrying out recovery of cargo from the Japanese ocean liner *Miyazaki Maru* (8,520 tons), sunk by German submarine U-88 on 31 May 1917, during a voyage from Yokohama to London, with a cargo that included Tjipetir blocks. (Submarine U-88 was captained by Walther Schwieger, one of Germany's most successful U-boat aces. Schwieger was also in charge of another German U-boat that in May 1915 had sunk the *RMS Lusitania*, which is thought to have hastened the US's entry into World War I.)

The wreck of the *Miyazaki Maru* lies 150 miles (241.5km) west of the Scilly Isles. "I was told that when salvage work is done, the cargo they are looking for is pulled out in large amounts, and the gutta-percha and rubber bales have been released from the ship's hold as a result," said Williams. Alison Kentuck, the British Government's Receiver of Wreck, the official who administers wreck and salvage laws within UK territorial waters, agrees that it is most likely the blocks are cargo from the *Miyazaki Maru*.

"Based on the findings so far, [the Tjipetir blocks] are clearly being fed into the hemispheric ocean circulation," said oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer, who specialises in tracking flotsam. "It only takes 25 years for flotsam to go around the world, and they've probably been around long enough to go around the world three times. They're still in good condition after all these years, which is unusual. They're probably one of the great pieces of flotsam that people may be finding 100 years from now."

Ebbesmeyer said various gyres (ocean currents) might pull the blocks from Spain across to the Americas "mirroring the same route that Columbus took" before possibly ending up in Florida. The ones found in the North Sea "should go up past Norway, turn east past the top of Siberia, go through the Bering Strait into the North Pacific and go all over from there". Ebbesmeyer has appeared in these pages before, explaining the travels of 29,000 plastic bath toys lost overboard in a Pacific storm in 1992 (**FT177:10**).

Several people have also reported finding Tjipetir blocks back in 2008, before the current salvage operation is thought to have begun on the *Miyazaki Maru*. One person has come forward to say they found a block more than 30 years ago and used it as a chopping board to gut fish on their fishing boat. "Many ships would have been carrying gutta-percha, so it's possible that the cargo is coming from more than one source," said Williams. "It is being seen as pollution – and I clean debris from my local beaches all the time – but the gutta-percha is a natural product, so it does degrade. I've seen disintegrated blocks on the beach. Perhaps other companies are salvaging material from World War I wrecks too. It is possible that some of it is from the *Titanic*. I don't know." *Times, 11 Nov; [AP] BBC News, 1 Dec 2014.*

The illusionist's heist

Just one touch was all it took for a con-artist to clean up

Police are hunting a man captured on CCTV seemingly using an elaborate form of distraction to steal a large sum of cash – sending a shopkeeper into an apparent trance as he rifled through his pockets. DCI Marco Bardetti, the officer leading the hunt, said he did not think the victim had been properly hypnotised, describing it as a "very well practised stage act or parlour trick" – adding that he had not seen anything like it in 20 years of policing. The 45-second heist, which bore similarities to the techniques used by the illusionist Derren Brown, is thought to be the first time such a crime has been captured on camera – in the UK, anyway.

The robber enters Hops 'n' Pops wine merchants in Archway Road, Highgate, north London, at 9.40pm on 11 September 2014. He brushes past the owner, Aftab Haider, 56, (known as Aziz), touching him as he passes, then waits about three seconds, and gestures with his raised right hand before taking the wallet from Haider's left trouser pocket. The shopkeeper appears rooted to the spot. Another man (an accomplice?) loiters in the doorway, unmentioned in the press reports. Talking all the time, the robber then touches Haider on the shoulder and chest, mimes the gestures of a pregnant woman, taps his own stomach rapidly with both hands and quickly removes a large wad of banknotes from Haider's right trouser pocket. Afterwards, Haider was unable to explain what had happened, but recalled the man saying his wife was pregnant and need water. As the man makes a swift exit, brushing past another customer who has just come in, Haider apparently emerges

from a trance-like state and shouts, "Oi, oi, excuse me," after the man. "I went after him," he told TV's *Crimewatch*, "but another man drove him off in a car. There was no pregnant wife in it."

Police described the suspect as possibly eastern European, 30–35, slim and about 5ft 8ins (1.73m) tall. He was wearing dark jeans, a grey polo shirt and a black bomber jacket with white writing just below the collar. A friend of the shopkeeper said: "We had no idea Aziz had been hypnotised. When he told me what happened, I just thought, how could he have just let someone hug him and start going though his pockets? He had hundreds of pounds stolen from him. It's worrying if people can do that, other people might do the same."

Magician Damien O'Brien speculated that Haider might have been previously hypnotised to implant 'trigger' words into his subconscious. "You can never hypnotise someone on the first go, you warm them up," he asserted. "He may have said on an earlier visit that the next time he comes in and touches the man on the shoulder he is going to go into a relaxed trance and will let him go into his pockets." However, wouldn't Haider have recognised the man if he had encountered him before? In any case such prior 'programming' would not account for many similar hyno-heists detailed in these pages. In 1996, for instance, several thousand people in Java fell victim to light-fingered crooks with gimlet eyes [**FT93:10**]. *guardian.com, 5 Dec; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, Sun, 6 Dec 2014.*

In March 2014, Sarah Alexeyeva, a 66-year-old Russian, was approached by two women in front of an Aldi supermarket in Elmshorn, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. A police spokesperson said: "They were also Russian and told her they would read her fortune, but the next thing she knew she was back home sitting in an armchair and all her jewellery and valuables had vanished." Police were keen to trace two other possible victims, women aged around 35 and 55. *D.Mail, 4 Mar 2014.*

In July 2014, a business-woman told Moscow police how two robbers hypnotised her into swapping her BMW for cash at a pawn shop – and giving them the proceeds. CCTV showed her meeting the couple in a street, accompanying them to the shop and handing over the cash. She had no memory of the transaction. *Sun, 16 July 2014.* For other examples of hypno-theft, see **FT50:21, 60:32, 72:9, 79:48, 98:8, 120:7, 126:9, 139:8, 155:20, 176:28, 235:9, 277:5.**

SIDELINES...

PRECIOUS WATER

At least two houses in the Montana town of Whitehall – the residences of Mark and Sharon Brown and their neighbour Paul Harper – found gleaming flakes in their tap water that turned out to be pure gold. There is an open pit gold mine five miles (8km) away, but water quality officials didn't think it had any connection to the town's water supply. *KTVM, 6 June 2014.*

CRETAN CROC

Residents in Crete blamed a 6ft (1.8m) Nile crocodile for missing lambs and ducks – and souvenir shops were selling inflatable versions of it. Firemen spotted the reptile on 6 July in a man-made lake near the seaside town of Rethymno. It was thought to be an abandoned pet. Nicknamed Sifis, it was still at large in September, having evaded all attempts to trap it. The critter even had a Facebook page. *Irish Examiner, 9 July; Guardian, 3 Sept 2014.*

LONG TIME PRICKED

A needle found in a patient aged 60, who was being treated for chest and back pains in Jiujiang, China, was from acupuncture he had 40 years earlier, in 1974. *Sun, 4 Oct 2014.*

RODENT ROMEO

A guinea pig nicknamed 'Randy' escaped his enclosure at an animal sanctuary in Hatton, Warwickshire, and mated with 100 female guinea pigs. The average pups in a litter is four, so keepers were expecting around 400 babies after a few weeks. *Times, 7 June 2014.*

SIDELINES...

MISSING TIME IN ROSWELL

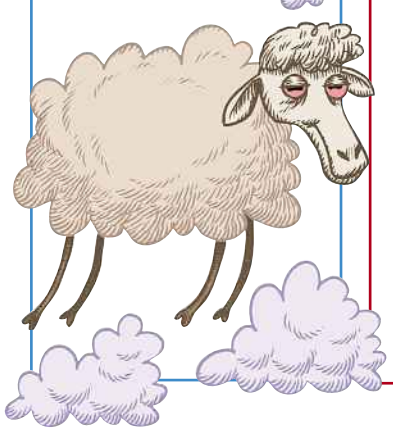
A driver who went missing after a one-car rollover in Roswell, New Mexico, on 12 September rang police seven hours later to say he was lost and had woken up in a field full of donkeys. He claimed that he and a passenger were drinking the night before but didn't remember what happened next. He had injuries to a shoulder and his hands and the passenger suffered back injuries. *[AP] 18 Sept 2014.*

DISASTER AVERTED

Two macaque monkeys lived near a small Hanuman temple in Dakachya village in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. On 2 September, one of them was chased by dogs, fell into a pond, and drowned. To avert bad luck, the villagers held a funeral procession, cremated the animal, and arranged a lavish feast to pray for its soul, while 700 men shaved their heads and beards in mourning. Some then travelled to Haridwar to immerse the monkey's ashes in the Ganges. *BBC News, 17 Sept 2014.*

STONED SHEEP

A flock of sheep was left feeling rather woolly-headed after munching on £4,000-worth of 3ft (90cm) cannabis plants in seven bags that had been dumped in their field on Fanny's Farm in Mersham, Surrey. "They weren't quite on their backs with their legs in the air, but they probably had the munchies," said their owner Nellie Budd, a farm shop manager. "I'll tell you about the meat next week." *Sunday Telegraph, 19 Oct 2014.*



BURMA'S GIANT BELL

300 TONNES OF BRONZE - AND A POINT OF BURMESE PRIDE

ABOVE: The biggest bell the world had ever seen – possibly lost off Monkey Point at the confluence of the Bago and Yangon rivers.

The fate of the Dhammazedi Bell is one of Burma's murkiest mysteries. Last summer, a new salvage attempt was under way in Yangon (Rangoon). Legend has it that the bell, the biggest the world has ever seen, was cast in the 1480s by order of King Dhammazedi and was given to the Schwe Dagon Pagoda in Dagon (modern Yangon), the most sacred Buddhist site in Burma (aka Myanmar). It was made of 297,103kg (655,000lb) of metal – that's nearly 300 tonnes – mostly bronze but with some gold and silver. In 1583, Gasparo Balbi, a Venetian gem merchant, visited the Shwe Dagon Pagoda and wrote in his diary: "I found in a faire Hall a very large Bell, which we measured, and found to be seven paces and three hand breadths, and it is full of Letters from the top to the bottome… but there was no Nation that could understand them, no not the men of Pegu, and they remember not whence, nor how it came thither." (*Viaggio delle Indie Orientali*, etc, Venice, 1590).

> **"I found in a very faire Hall a very large Bell"**

In 1608 the Portuguese adventurer and mercenary Filipe de Brito e Nicote – known locally as Nga Zinga – seized the bell with the aim of melting it down to make ships' cannons. He rolled it down Singuttara Hill to a raft on the Pazundaung Creek. From here, the bell was hauled by elephants to the Pegu (now Bago) River. The bell and raft were lashed to de Brito's flagship for the journey across the river to Syriam (present day Thanlyin), but at the confluence of the Pegu and Yangon Rivers, off what is now known as Monkey Point, the raft broke up and the bell went to the bottom, taking de Brito's ship with it.

In subsequent centuries, recovering the bell became a point of both Buddhist and Burmese national pride. There have been at least seven serious salvage attempts in the last 25 years, some involving international teams and sophisticated underwater equipment. One in 1995 involved deep-sea diver James Blunt, another the Australian filmmaker Damien Lay. The water is muddy and visibility extremely poor. Three shipwrecks in the area compound the difficulties.

More than £150,000 was donated towards the latest attempt, which began on 9 August, and every day hundreds of spectators gathered on the banks of the Bago River eager for the latest news. Many sat for hours huddled under umbrellas, shielded from both the hot sun and the regular deluges of monsoon rain. Two old wooden vessels were used by the diving

YE SUNG THU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

YE SUNG THU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Locals watching the attempted salvage. **ABOVE**: The crew on the Yangon river.

teams. Operations were guided by Thanlyin Nat Sin Tayar Sayadaw, a monk rumoured to have clairvoyant powers, sitting on one of the boats. Ten young ethnic Salons, or sea gypsies, known for their underwater skills, put on simple diving masks before leaping into the water clutching a hosepipe for air. The river current was fast so after a minute or two they re-surfaced and were hauled back on to the boat, before leaping back in.

This was a search based on the supernatural rather than science. "If we just rely on modern technology we will face more problems," said U San Lin, the leader of the salvage attempt. He believed that the bell is guarded by a nest of Nagas, or mythical serpents, and that only a spiritual approach could locate it. "We must use our traditional ways so that the dragon spirit does not keep hold of the bell," he said. For many Burmese academics San Lin's approach was an embarrassment, and they would like to see teams with better equipment allowed in. In 2013 a team from Singapore with a budget of £6 million declared themselves ready, but they were still waiting for official approval. San Lin told a press conference that the bell had been found on 26 August and would be brought to land in a few days.

However, in September, Thanlyin Nat Sin Tayar Sayadaw denied ever claiming that the bell had been found and accused Burmese newspapers of misquoting him. It appears U San Lin was a victim of wishful thinking.

Historian Chit San Win has spent most of his life researching and writing about the Dhammazedi Bell, and following the failed salvage efforts. He said that both the Yangon and Bago Rivers have changed course in the last 400 years, making it almost certain that the search has been in the wrong place. More worryingly, having scoured Burmese literature for supporting evidence of the Great Bell, he now has serious doubts that it ever really existed. "I really hope that the bell is real, it would make me so proud of our country," he said; "but if we look at the three main Burmese history books written 200 years after the bell sunk, none of them mention it." But what about Gasparo Balbi's description of the bell in 1583? And Filipe de Brito e Nicote was certainly an historical character: he was captured by King Anaukphetlun and publicly burnt to death on a spit as "an infidel and violator of pagodas". *BBC News, 19 Aug; kennethwongssf.blogspot.co.uk, 24 Aug; mizzima.com, 27 Aug; dvb.no, 15 Sept 2014.*

SIDELINES...

OVERCOOKED

A drunken woman accused of starting a fire in her ex-boyfriend's house in Utah by leaving 1lb (0.45kg) of bacon cooking unattended was to stand trial on arson charges. Her name? Cameo Crispi, 32. *irishexaminer.com, 1 Sept 2014.*

HAMPSHIRE FAUNA

Within the space of an hour, police in Hampshire were called to deal with both a wallaby and an alpaca running wild within 10 miles (16km) of each other. Officers failed to find the wallaby in Kingsclere; the RSPCA said it might not be an escapee as there were settled populations in Britain. The alpaca was reunited with its local owner. *D.Telegraph, 6 Aug 2014.*

DOUBLE WHITE

Two lobstermen each caught a rare albino lobster within a week. Bret Philbrick and Joe Bates trapped the crustaceans – just one in 100 million lobsters are albino – off the coast of Maine. It was planned to put them on public display. *Metro, 8 Sept 2014.*

VINTAGE SNACK

Volunteers dismantling an organ in Padiham Road Methodist church in Burnley, Lancashire, found a perfectly preserved sandwich left there by the organ-fitters 118 years ago. Beside it was a local newspaper from 1896. *Sun, 2 July 2014.*

PRODIGAL MONKEYS

Failing to find food in a house in Shimla in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh on 31 August, a macaque monkey stole 10,000 rupees (£100), sat on a tin roof and began throwing down banknotes one by one. As people began collecting them, it moved on to a tree, and then into thick pine trees, pursued by an ever-swelling crowd, and continued its simian largesse. The same thing had happened in Shimla the previous February. *BBC News, 2 Sept 2014.*

SIDELINES...

BROTHERS-IN-LAWLESS

A 33-year-old Birmingham man had skipped bail while facing motoring charges, so when police halted him he gave his brother's name, unaware he too was a wanted man – wanted for assault. *Sun, 3 Sept 2014.*

ELECTIVE AFFINITY

A butterfly that escaped from the Natural History Museum made a beautiful sight when it landed in a fashion store. Staff at Louise Kennedy in Belgravia, central London, spotted the blue 6in (15cm) *Morpho menelaus* on a butterfly-print dress, and called the RSPCA. *D.Telegraph, 17 Sept 2014.*

SERPENT MISCHIEF

Sarah Espinosa, 22, from Albany, New York, crashed her Toyota Prius into a Long Island fire station on 4 August, damaging two fire trucks. She had a python wrapped around her neck, which she had stolen from a nearby pet shop. Police were not sure if the snake had caused her to crash, or if her driving was impaired by drink. *[R] 5 Aug 2014.*

DANGEROUS TOWELS

Asked on his television programme *The 700 Club* whether a trip to Kenya was risky, batty televangelist Pat Robertson said: "You might get Aids in Kenya. The towels could have Aids." *D.Telegraph, 25 Oct 2014.*

WHAT A PRATT

A suspected drug dealer was caught with a stash in his underwear – in a village called Pratt's Bottom. The 26-year-old was held after police saw him driving suspiciously in the village, in south-east London. More drugs were found in his car. *Metro, 3 Oct 2014.*

SHOOTING THE MOON

Cameron Read, 39, of Prescott Valley, Arizona, was arrested for unlawfully discharging a firearm after his girlfriend reported him. "He told us the Moon was coming towards him and he wanted to shoot it," said a policeman. He admitted smoking weed. *Adelaide Sunday Mail, 15 June 2104.*

MOONBOW AND HALO

ALESSANDRA PIASECKA

GABRIEL BOUYS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

VERONA MOONBOW

This impressive photograph (top) of a "real" lunar rainbow above Castelvecchio Bridge in Verona, Italy, was taken at about 9.20pm on 22 June 2013. The photographer was Alessandra Piasecka, who writes: "I've loved rainbows since I was a child and the magical and fascinating lunar rainbow has a special charm. I had long wanted to capture this rare phenomenon, which requires several preconditions: a full Moon, a very dark sky, a specific angle of the Moon in relation to the Earth, the presence of humidity particles after a light rain and the absence of nearby waterfalls producing the 'spray' effect. It also required a long exposure. I tried several times to capture it, but the conditions were never quite right until that evening. It was about half an hour after sunset. I shot at f/11, 73", 100 ISO (EXIF data). The naked eye cannot catch it so I had to check the 'Live View' of my Relfex: when I realised I had succeeded I was very happy and excited. It was a dream realised." For more of Ms Piasecka's photographs, see www.alessandrapiasecka.com.

ST PETER'S HALO

Photographer Gabriel Bouys captured this atmospheric shot (above). It shows the silhouette of a statue at St Peter's Square as the Sun rose through clouds before a general audience of Pope Francis on 29 October 2014 at the Vatican.

How to Become a Successful Writer!

By Marian Ashcroft

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Hannah Evans "I've been published in The Guardian and Good Life earning £400. And now I've got my first book published by Bloomsbury called MOB Rule: Lessons Learned by a Mother of Boys. The Writers Bureau course provided me with structure, stopped my procrastination but most importantly it provided the impetus to try something different." Published

Chris Green "I've had 30 pieces of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago. I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time. Thanks to the careful and patient tutoring provided by The Writers Bureau and the boundless confidence this has given me, I can continue to explore my potential and see where it takes me." Published

Jane Isaac "When I started the Writers Bureau course, I wanted to explore avenues for my writing and develop and strengthen my personal style. I had no idea that it would lead to me being a published writer of novels and short stories. I still pinch myself when I receive emails and messages from readers who've enjoyed my work or when I give talks to book clubs and visit bookstores to do signings. These are magical moments that have changed my life – my dream has come true." Published

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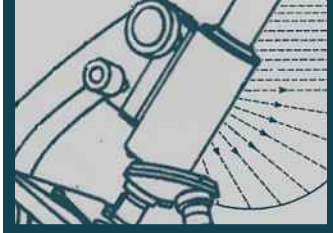

MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

THE MORGELLONS MYSTERY

DAVID HAMBLING provides an update on a mysterious disease dismissed by the medical establishment as psychological in origin; but were its sufferers right all along?

Morgellons Disease or MD, characterised by a rash, mystery fibres and a crawling sensation under your skin, belongs to the Internet era. Medical science couldn't pin down MD and ended up dismissing it as purely psychological; sufferers responded by banding together online to form pressure groups. And as a result of further research, the narrative is slowly starting to change. The crazy people might have been right all along.

The name Morgellons was first used in 1674 by Sir Thomas Browne when describing children in Languedoc with hair-like extrusions growing from their backs [1]; it may be a corruption of a Provençal word for little flies. The term was revived in 2002 by Mary Leaitao, an American housewife driven to carry out her own research into her son's skin condition. Leaitao went on to set up the website Morgellons.org and became Executive Director of the Morgellons Research Foundation.

Patients typically suffer from severe itching or stinging, and a sensation of insects burrowing and crawling under the skin, known medically as 'formication'. Patients are generally highly distressed and often report finding filaments embedded in their skin. They often collect these filaments to show to their doctor.

A medical professional encountering such a patient will immediately recognise 'matchbox sign', one of the hallmarks of delusional parasitosis (described by your correspondent back in **FT167:19**). This is the highly infectious belief that something is irritating the skin – if you start scratching, or even talking about fleas and lice, others will start scratching too. The samples collected by sufferers tend to be scabs, hair, or clothing fibres. The skin damage is often caused by persistent scratching or responses to the perceived infestation such as self-treatment with insecticide or bleach.

Morgellons advocates eventually persuaded the US Centres for Disease Control (CDC) to investigate. The 2012 CDC study [2] couldn't find any organic cause: "No common underlying medical condition or infectious source was identified, similar to more commonly recognized conditions such as delusional infestation."

ABOVE: The spirochete *Borrelia burgdoferi*, the pathogen that causes Lyme disease.

Significantly, the CDC study found many patients in their sample were using drugs or solvents, and were in poor mental shape. They recommended treatment as for delusional conditions.

This is very much the prevailing view. A current study from the *American Journal of Clinical Dermatology* [3] stresses the lack of evidence for infectious agents in Morgellons and the importance of a supportive, non-confrontational approach when dealing with patients. They recommend treatment by a team including dermatologists, psychiatrists and counsellors. The aim is not to minimise what the patient experiences, but clearly the medical profession does not share their view: "Patients with Morgellons disease generally lack insight into their disease and reject the need for psychiatric help."

Similarly, another recent paper on treating Morgellons with hypnotherapy [4] suggests that this is effective in dealing with both the physical and the psychological aspects of the condition.

Of course it doesn't help that some sufferers have treated the medical response as evidence of a massive conspiracy. At the far end, Morgellons is linked to bioterrorism or chemtrails; supposedly the fibres or the agent that causes them are being covertly sprayed from aircraft.

It is perhaps an indication of the stigma attached to mental illness that people would still rather be diagnosed with an organic condition than a psychological one. Although conditions like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are becoming more respectable, veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan wish to be seen as suffering from Mild Traumatic Brain Injury rather than being psychological casualties. Similarly, Morgellons sufferers continue to insist that there is a physical basis for their condition.

The first signs of a breakthrough came in a 2012 chemical and microscopic study of Morgellons filaments by Raphael Stricker and colleagues of the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society.[5]

This found that the filaments did not match textile fibres, and were very strong and heat resistant. However, they were not alien material from burrowing insects or other parasites: they were of human cellular origin. Specifically they were made of keratin, the material that makes up hair and fingernails. The mystery fibres were being produced in the skin by rogue cells known as keratinocytes stimulated by an unknown factor.

The authors noted similarities between Morgellons Disease and bovine digital dermatitis (BDD), a disease of cattle characterised by unusual filaments in the skin above the hooves. BDD lesions are associated with a type of bacteria known as spirochetes, and the suggestion is that MD is caused by a similar agent. Spirochetes are also behind the tick-borne Lyme disease (hence Stricker's involvement), and they produce symptoms like joint pain and neurological disorders often seen in MD patients. Two of the three patients in the study tested positive for *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the spirochete mainly responsible for Lyme Disease.

A follow-up study investigating the connection between spirochetal infection and Morgellons disease [6] found *Borrelia* spirochetes in all four of four randomly selected MD sufferers.

"The association of MD with spirochetal infection provides evidence that this infection may be a significant factor in the illness and refutes claims that MD lesions are self-inflicted and that people suffering from this disorder are delusional," note the authors.

One of the cruellest aspects of about MD is the psychological element – "there are usually components of psychiatric morbidity," as the researchers put it. They class these as being in the depressive/anxiety spectrum rather than being delusional, and suggest that MD may affect the nervous system, amplifying stimuli or causing misperception.

In Darwinian terms it is only to be expected: a parasite that avoids medical treatment by making the host appear to be mad rather than infected.

The medical establishment may yet carry out a volte-face. In the past, peptic ulcers were always seen as being caused by stress, but after Nobel-Award-winning research they were accepted as being caused by bacteria. Perhaps Morgellons may come back from the fringe as a genuine physical condition.

NOTES

1 http://penelope.uchicago.edu/letter/letter.html

2 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22295070

3 http://link.springer.com/article/10.2165/11533150-000000000-00000#page-1

4 www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00207144.2011.546263#.VFndYo1ya1I

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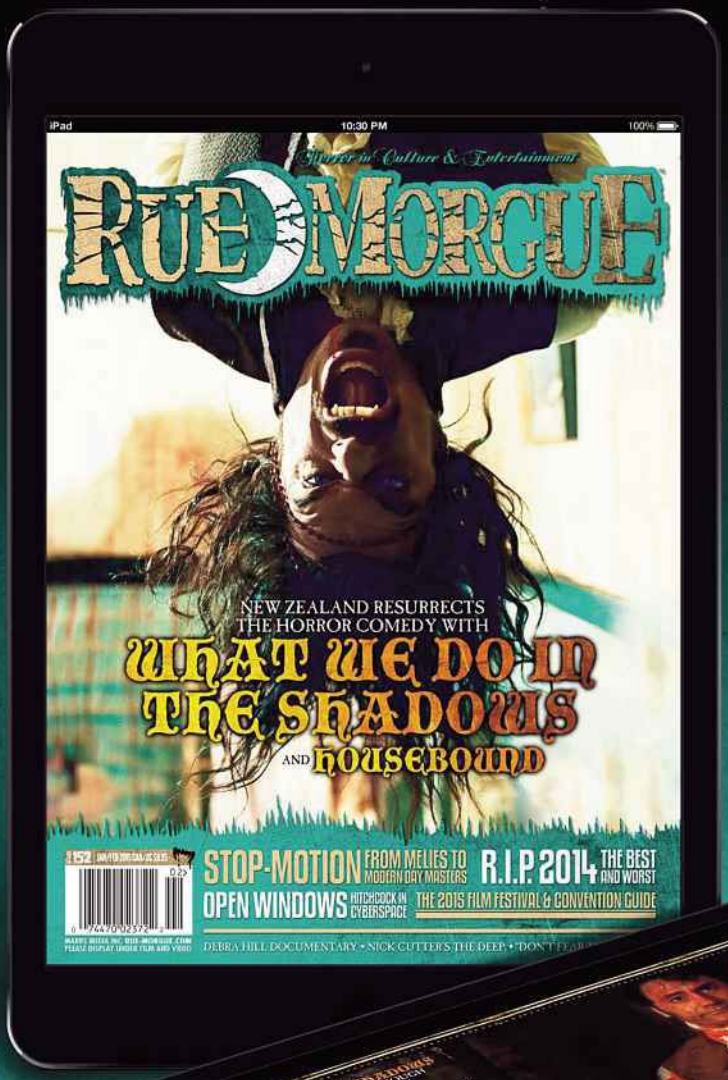
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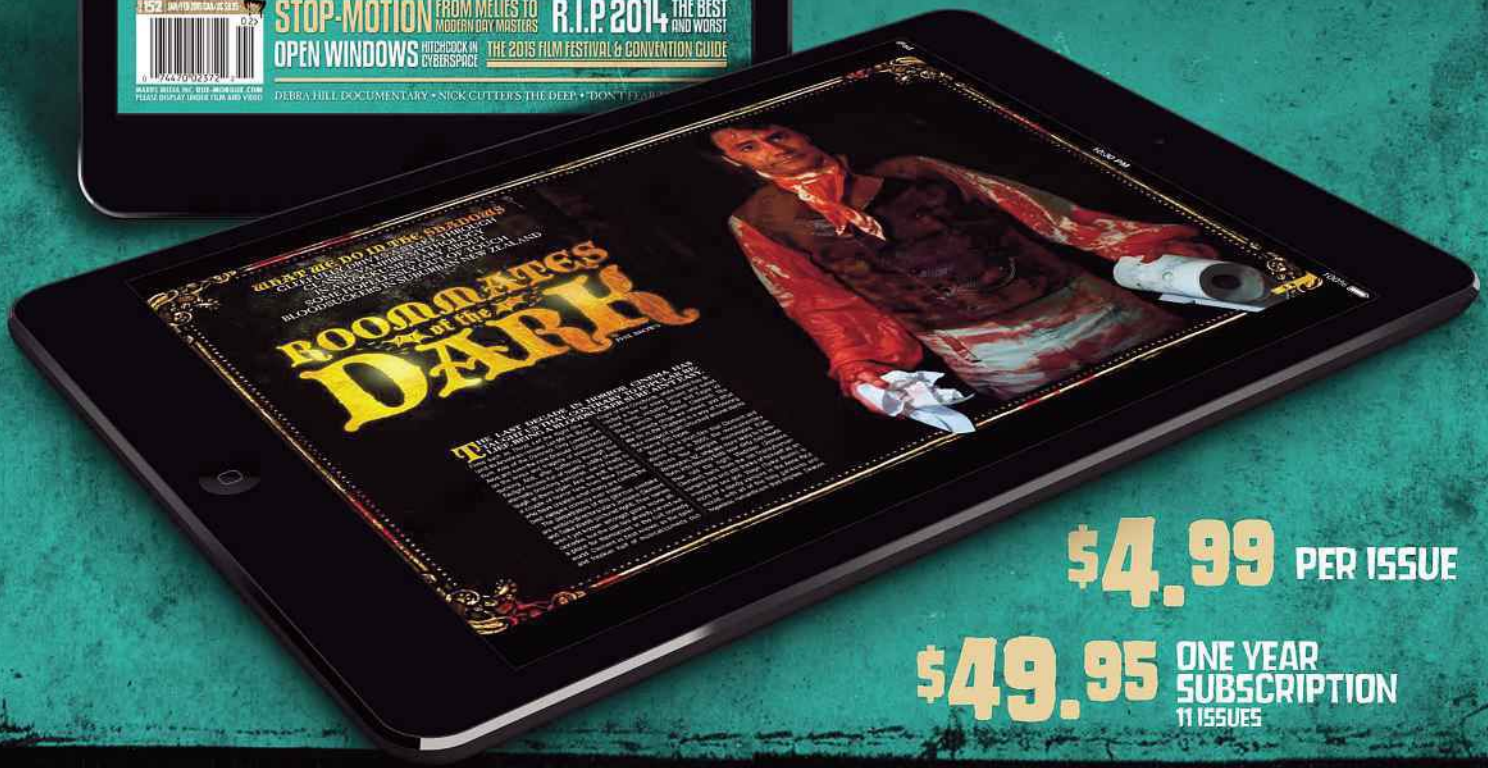

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SPECIAL REPORT

DABIQ: THE TOWN AT THE END OF THE WORLD

TED HARRISON digs into islamic eschatology to explain why, for jihadis, a small town in Syria might be the most important place on Earth

Dabiq is a small Syrian town north of Aleppo and close to the Turkish border. In most respects it is a remote backwater of little importance; and yet its capture was given priority last summer by the notorious Islamic State movement (aka Daesh/Isis/Isil). It was the location, Isis boasted, of at least one of the vicious beheadings of Western hostages.

Dabiq is also the name chosen by Isis for the masthead of its glossy propaganda magazine. The publication is printed in several languages, including English, and is aimed at recruiting jihadists from the West.

But why choose the name of a town with a population of under 4,000 in a remote area of the Middle East for a magazine title? And why target a town of limited military or strategic significance?

A clue lies in the words of an Isis executioner as recorded on video: "Here we are, burying the first American Crusader in Dabiq, eagerly waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive."

The answer lies in an influential Islamic version of the Apocalypse. Dabiq is to many Muslims what Armageddon is to Christians: the place where a great End Time battle is destined to be fought.

The Sunni and Shia traditions have their differences when it come to eschatology, the study of the end of time, but the two strands of Islam hold many apocalyptic prophecies in common. There is no single and authoritative account of the Apocalypse

Islamic eschatology talks of great conflicts

in The Qur'an comparable to the Bible's Book of Revelation, but several Hadith – collections of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed – set out what to expect. There will be a time of warning, it is said, when world events will point to the imminent Day of Judgment, Qiyamah. There will be both major and minor signs. Of the many minor ones there will be an increase in immorality, in greed, in the drinking of alcohol and in war.

The major signs consist of 10 extraordinary events, including the descent of Jesus, or Isa, the Sun rising in the west and the arrival of the Mahdi, the great Islamic leader of the final days.

ABOVE: Scenes from Dabiq have turned up in Isis videos, with the Islamic State flag seen flying over the town's rooftops.

BELOW: A view of Dabiq, allegedly showing the ruins of the Sulayman Bin-Abd-al-Malik shrine, believed to have been destroyed by Isis militants.

Allah has not given a date for Qiyamah, but, as in the Christian tradition, there are many believers who have attempted to calculate the day, month and year. In both fundamentalist Christianity and Islam there is currently a sense of urgency; in particular, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 is viewed as a crucial pointer to the final events in human history on Earth.

While Christians expect a figure known as the Antichrist to precede the return of Jesus, in Islam there are the figures of the Dajjal and the Suffyani. The Dajjal will be a false messiah and embodiment of evil, the Suffyani a tyrant who "will kill children and rip open the bellies of women". In that it is prophesied he will come from Damascus, the Suffyani has been identified in some quarters as Bashar al Assad, the Syrian president. In one source, a description of the Suffyani's physical appearance is given which, it is now being argued, matches that of the Syrian leader in many respects.

It has been prophesied that when the Suffyani hears of the Mahdi's arrival he will send an army to kill him, but the Earth will swallow up his troops before they can reach him. The Mahdi is the figure who will rule on Earth before Judgment Day. For Sunnis, the Mahdi is a figure yet to come; for Shia he has already arrived, but remains hidden until the moment of revelation. (For more on various candidates for the Mahdi, see **FT304:10-11**)

In September 2012, addressing the United Nations in New York, the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke of events to come from a Shia perspective and the return of the figure known as the Twelfth Imam. "God Almighty has promised us a man of kindness, a man who loves people and loves absolute justice, a man who is a perfect human being and is named Imam Al-Mahdi, a man who will come in the company of Jesus Christ," he said. The appearance of the Mahdi on Earth "will mark a new beginning, a rebirth and a resurrection. It will be the beginning of peace, lasting security and genuine life."

Peace may be the world's destiny, but before that is possible Islamic eschatology talks of great wars and conflicts. One hadith suggests that "the last hour will not come" until Muslims vanquish the infidels at Dabiq, before going on to conquer Istanbul. Istanbul will be overpowered not by military might, but by the chanting of the Takbeer, the Arabic phrase "All hu Akbar" – God is great.

The final battle at Dabiq is described in detail in Islamic lore. Hadith 6924 states: "An army consisting of the best soldiers of the people of the Earth at that time will come from Medina. They will then fight and a third part of the army will run away, whom Allah will never forgive. A third part of the army will be excellent martyrs in Allah's eye and will be killed and the remaining third will win and will be conquerors of Constantinople."

The Battle of Dabiq will not be an easy victory, but under the command of the Mahdi, Islam will triumph.

"Dabiq is the most important village in all of Syria for them… especially the foreign fighters," one rebel who fought against Isis told the *Wall Street Journal*. "They take the prophecies very seriously."

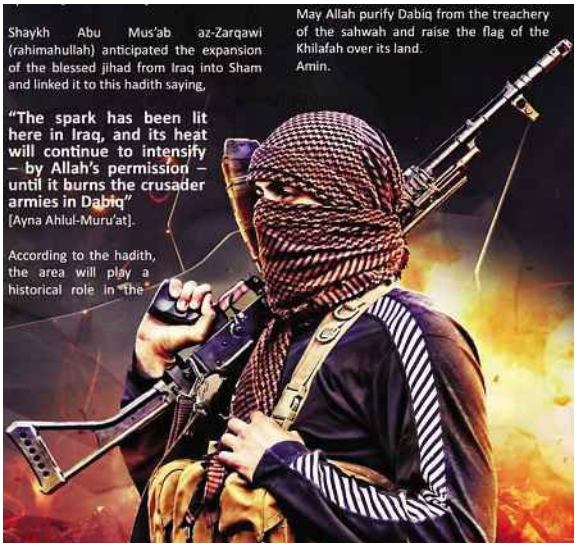
One jihadist was reported to have sent a message via Twitter: "Dabiq will happen for certain. The US and its allies will descend on Syria once they see that the air campaign has failed. That is a promise by God and his Messenger."

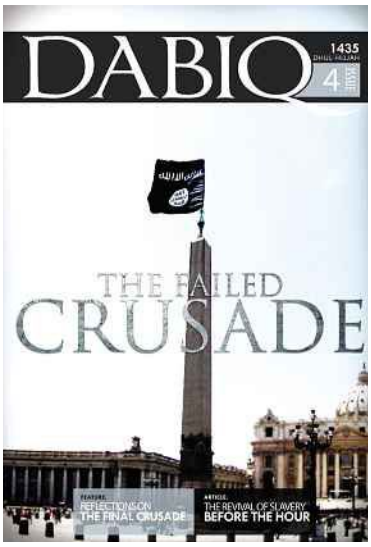
"The lions of Islam have raised the banner of the Caliphate in Dabiq," said another tweet. "Now they await the arrival of the Crusader army."

For many years the jihadists have been elevating Dabiq's importance. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the militant Islamist who was killed in Iraq in a US airstrike in 2006, once said: "The spark has been ignited in Iraq, and its flames will grow until they burn the Crusader armies in Dabiq."

Fired up by apocalyptic prophecies, many observers believe that Isis wishes to goad the Americans and other forces from the West to engage them in battle on Syrian soil.

There will, of course, be some American Christians who will regard military engagement as consistent with their own End Time beliefs, and the Islamic and Christian prophecies merge in the latter section of Hadith 6924. After the victories at Dabiq and Istanbul comes the final defeat of the Dajjal, the Antichrist figure, and the return of Jesus. "Jesus son of Mary will descend and… when the enemy of Allah sees him, he will vanish just as the salt dissolves itself in water".


Shaykh Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi (rahimahullah) anticipated the expansion of the blessed jihad from Iraq into Sham and linked it to this hadith saying,
"The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq"
[Ayna Ahlul-Muru'at].
According to the hadith, the area will play a historical role in the
May Allah purify Dabiq from the treachery of the sahwah and raise the flag of the Khilafah over its land.
Amin.



ABOVE: Apocalyptic Isis propaganda focused on Dabiq as the final battleground, as seen in the pages of their glossy magazine, itself named after the Syrian town.

RIGHT: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the invisible sheikh; and possibly a very mardy Mahdi to boot.

If any of these prophecies are to have any current relevance, there is need of a Mahdi. Who, in the view of the Isis jihadists might this be? One candidate is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of Isis, a mysterious figure who has been careful to reveal little about himself. His name is not his real name but a *nom de guerre*. His nickname, however, is 'the invisible sheikh' and when he addresses his commanders he is said to wear a mask.

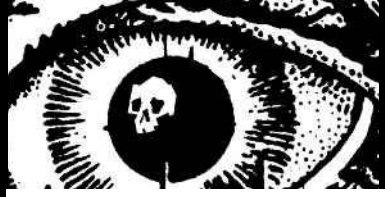
He emerged from the shadows briefly in July 2014 to preach a sermon at the Mosul great mosque in Iraq, in which he made no mention of the Mahdi and downplayed his own significance: "I have been plagued with this responsibility, and it is a heavy responsibility. I was placed as your caretaker, and I am not better than you. So if you found me to be right then help me, and if you found me to be wrong then advise me and make me right and obey me in what I obey Allah through you".

The history of Islam is full of false Mahdis, just as Judaism is of claimants to the role of Messiah and Christianity of mistaken Antichrists. The Hadith are the reported sayings of the prophet Mohammed, but they are not considered as authoritative as the Qur'an, which is believed to be the direct, revealed word of Allah. Scholars in Islam interpret the Hadith widely, and an over-literal reading of the sections claiming to outline the End of Time is discouraged by many schools of thought.

That apocalyptic beliefs are important to the Isis warriors is undeniable. That such ideas are influential in encouraging new recruits to join the struggle is also true. Dangerous political violence is undoubtedly being inspired, in part at least, by ancient prophecies of supernatural events.

It is too simple to say, despite the history of religious conflict, that all religions are a dangerous influence. Yet it can be said that religious people with a strong belief in the immanent End Times can be especially alarming. If the world is about to end in divinely ordained apocalypse, then the believers feel there is nothing to lose. Some Christian fundamentalists go as far as claiming that by provoking conflict in the Middle East the End is being hastened, and with it the judgment of the world and the eternal reward of the righteous – such as themselves.

The jihadists today are fired up by many things. Religious machismo, the peer group pressure of a perceived Islamic brotherhood, hatred of the West, to give some examples – but just as important is their fundamentalist version of Islamic eschatology. FT



MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE begins a two-part survey of the ghostly literature of the Great War

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Supporting troops of the 1st Australian Division near Hooge, in the Ypres Sector, October 1917. **BELOW:** Robert Graves related a ghostly encounter during WWI.

With commemorations of the centenary of the outbreak of World War I now well underway, the ghostly and paranormal aspects deserve closer study. With this in mind, over 10-14 September 2014, I took part in the Ghost Club trip to Flanders to explore some of the many sites in and around Ypres which feature in the history of the Great War. It proved a fascinating and often emotionally moving experience, with much of the Flanders landscape remaining shaped by the colossal scale of the conflict. The numerous graves and memorials have turned this part of Belgium into a giant Necropolis, where the honoured dead far outnumber the living population of today.

Such a numinous landscape ought to be filled with ghosts, yet surprisingly, aside from such well-known legends as the 'Angels of Mons' (see **FT170:30-38**), relatively few examples of apparitions or hauntings connected with the war have been noted, either at the time or in the century since. Indeed, the Society for Psychical Research stated in its *Report of Council for the Year* 1915: "One might perhaps have expected that the war, with its large tale of casualties and with the increased emotional tension accompanying it, would have produced a number of interesting experiences. But on the whole, evidence of apparitions at the time of death or wounding has been conspicuous by its absence. Such cases have doubtless occurred, but practically none of those which have reached us have come up on investigation to the standard of evidence required."

THE PSYCHIC ASPECTS OF THE GREAT WAR CAN BE CONSIDERED ON MANY LEVELS

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However, it seems the report was premature in its assessment. Undoubtedly a large amount of testimony relating to psychic experiences arising in the Great War existed but was widely diffused and dispersed, variously appearing in newspaper reports and personal memoirs published sporadically over many years, with yet more preserved only as oral traditions amongst the descendants of combatants.

The psychic aspects of the Great War can be considered at many levels. On the national and collective level, one may ask just what led whole nations and races to take up arms against each other so readily and enthusiastically, with displays of jubilation at the arrival of war, at least in the early stages of the conflict. Such questions have been raised concerning World War II and other conflicts by RA McConnell, who admitted being "haunted by the question: What unconscious logic creates such irrational frenzy? Is there some psychic factor waiting to be understood by parapsychology?" (See *An Introduction to Parapsychology in the Context of Science*, 1983). Notably after World War I, Sigmund Freud would speculate

about a death urge (*thanatos*) existing within humanity, in addition to the sexual drives and components proposed in psychoanalytic theory (See 'Freud's Concept of the Death Drive and its Relation to the Superego' by Joanne Faulkner, in *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 9 2005).

Aspects of mass psychology were considered by the Society for Psychical Research from as early as December 1914 when it appealed for first-hand information concerning the alleged passing of large bodies of Russian troops across the UK in August 1914. These included reports of troop trains thundering all night through junctions and the appearance of Russian soldiers seen "with snow on their boots" in the middle of August. Belief in these Russian legions swept through the country and may even have influenced the German commanders on the Continent. SPR enquiries suggested that "the 'materialising energy' of these Russian ghosts was further increased by the fact that during this same month of August, 1914, a substantial body of Russian reservists passed through this country on their way home from America. The men were not in uniform, but their nationality was likely to become known in any places through which they passed, and so the tale of Russian troops in England grew yet wilder", with the rumours being "composed of a large superstructure of fancy built on a small basis of fact... psychologically interesting as a remarkable instance of the speed with which a false rumour may spread".

An even more famous example were the 'Angels of Mons', which the SPR dismissed following enquiries soon after the alleged events, owing to lack of first-hand witnesses. (See 'An enquiry concerning "Angels at Mons"' in *Journal of the SPR*, 17 Dec 1915, pp.106-18; *Mysteries Solved and Unsolved*, 1958, by Harold T Wilkins.)

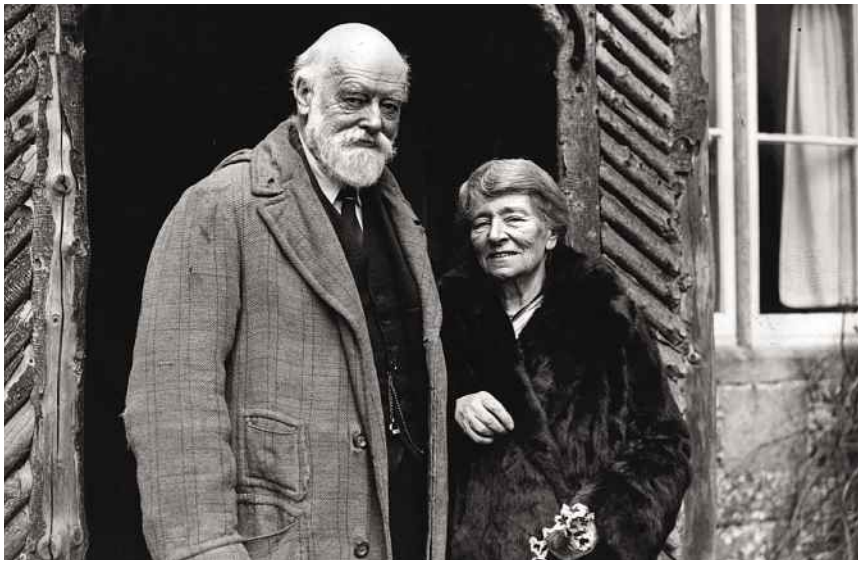
In fact, one very late witness of the 'Angel of Mons' actually emerged *en passant* in 1960, during an experiment into human perception and apparitional forms. This was conducted by the late Tony Cornell during a party at a house in Ayot Roding, Essex, involving the staging of a fake ghost in the garden for the benefit of 16 unsuspecting guests, in order to test their reactions.

Nearly all the guests proved to be amused rather than frightened by the fake 'phantom', deducing very quickly it was just a party trick. The exception was "a Mr AF Cheek, who was acting as the barman", who thought it was a real ghost when, on hearing the laughter, went to the window and saw the figure. Cornell reported: "An official observer standing three feet [90cm] away from him said that Mr Cheek was transfixed and did not take his eyes off the figure for the whole of the time it was visible, and appeared oblivious to his surroundings...[afterwards] Whilst being questioned he said that he had seen the 'Angels at Vimy Ridge' in 1917 as he was going over the top. He had never seen anything paranormal since..." Unfortunately, beyond these tantalising details, no further information was gleaned from Mr Cheek – though the battle of Vimy Ridge was nearly three years after the Battle of Mons. (See 'Further Experiments in Apparitional Observation', *Journal of the SPR* vol.40, no.706, Dec 1960.)

Alleged predictions and prophecies concerning the Great War were much in vogue throughout its duration and afterwards. These include claims that ghostly omens heralded the conflict, ranging from tales that the hounds of Herne the Hunter had been heard in Windsor Great Park to an extraordinary claim that the Screaming Skull of Bettiscombe in Dorset sweated blood in 1914 in anticipation of the conflict. (See *The Lore of the Land*, 2008, by Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson; *A Gazetteer of British Ghosts*, 1971, by Peter Underwood).

Terrible imagery also appeared in dreams, notably those of Carl Jung (1875-1961), who had disturbing nightmares of an "intolerable outpouring of blood" and the German mythical hero Siegfried during 1913, as described in his *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1961). Critical scrutiny of many alleged prophecies revealed very few that rated as potentially precognitive; perhaps the most interesting were those produced

ABOVE: 'Shining Angels throw a protective curtain around men from the Lincolnshire Regiment at Mons' in a picture from the 1915 book *The Chariots of the Gods.*



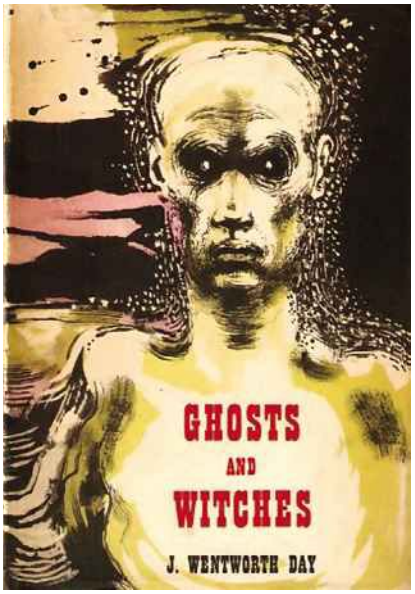
HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Sir Oliver Joseph Lodge with his wife at their home in 1928. **BELOW:** James Wentworth Day described witnessing a phantom WWI cavalry charge in his 1954 book on ghosts and witches.

by automatic writing by 'Mrs King', the pseudonym of Dame Edith Lyttelton, prior to 1914, including possible indications of the sinking of the *Lusitania*. (See JG Piddington, 'Forecasts in scripts concerning the War', *Proceedings of the SPR* vol.33, 1923, pp.439-605.)

Aside from the "Angels of Mons" perhaps the most impressive visionary experience of ghostly figures was that of James Wentworth Day, who saw phantom French and German cavalry re-enacting a skirmish from the early days of 1914. Day witnessed this in November 1918 at Bailleul, Flanders, describing his experience in his *Here are Ghosts and Witches* (1954) and his last book on hauntings, *Essex Ghosts* (1974). Given Day's pronounced tendencies for weaving ripping yarns and his role as enthusiastic propagandist for ghostly folklore (sometimes dreaming up fictitious local characters for dramatic effect), one might suspect that this episode was an exercise in imaginative writing; but he named a fellow witness, a Corporal Jock Barr of Glasgow, and from the circumstantial details he provided it is possible to pinpoint the location to a precise hilltop.

On an individual level, daily exposure to the risk of sudden death and the appalling toll in casualties made many servicemen and women highly superstitious, prone to "believing in signs of the most trivial nature", as admitted by poet Robert Graves in his classic *Goodbye To All That* (1929). Early in the war a password used by British soldiers in the trenches was "ghosts" (see *The Star*, 22 June 1951), and Graves recalled his own sighting of the phantom of a Private Challoner of the Royal Welch at Bethune in June 1915, whilst he was dining with comrades on "new potatoes, fish, green peas, mutton chops, strawberries and cream and three bottles of Pommard." Graves suddenly saw Pte Challoner looking in the window of their billet, salute them and move on. Jumping up and looking outside Graves



saw nothing but a smoking cigarette butt. "I could not mistake him or the cap badge he wore; yet no Royal Welch battalion was billeted within miles of Bethune at the time". Challoner had been killed at Festubert in May 1915, having previously told Graves: "I'll see you in France, sir" before they had left England.

However, this incident did not disturb Graves anything as much as his experience on leave at Harlech in Wales when staying with a grieving woman whose son had been killed in France. She had left his room unchanged as a shrine to his memory, with linen regularly laundered and fresh flowers and cigarettes placed by the bed. After talking until late with an army comrade, Graves recorded that on retiring to bed he was continually awakened by raps, getting louder and louder, which seemed to come from everywhere, and then by shrieks of a maid suffering hysterics. "In the morning I told my friend, 'I'm leaving this place. It's worse than France'". This sounds like an outbreak of poltergeist phenomena, but Graves attributed such manifestations to the dabbling of his hostess who along with "thousands of mothers like her...[was] getting in touch with their dead sons by various spiritualistic means".

Another autobiography telling of ghostly sounds is Vera Brittan's pacifist classic *Testament of Youth* (1933), which records her spontaneous experience of hearing unexplained footsteps crossing a ward full of wounded and dying servicemen at a military hospital in London while she was on a night shift as a nurse.

Some 10 years afterwards, the *Daily News* published a book *Ghosts in the Great War*, a collection of readers' letters and stories of ghostly experiences both at the Front and at home. Unfortunately, the precise details and identities of almost all of the informants were disguised, but the book provides accounts of crisis apparitions and cases of ghostly warnings and presentiments that saved the lives of men in the trenches. (See *Ghosts in the Great War and True Tales of Haunted Houses*, 1927, edited by S Louis Giraud)

Ultimately, the hope of the SPR to obtain well-witnessed accounts and evidence arising from the Great War was tragically fulfilled after Second Lieutenant Raymond Lodge, son of one of its leading members, the physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, was killed by shrapnel near Ypres on 14 September 1915. Some days before news of the death of Raymond was received, a warning of impending misfortune came at a séance with the medium Mrs Piper. However, far more compelling evidence of survival was to be found in numerous communications received subsequently from 'Raymond' via different mediums. Sir Oliver Lodge subsequently wrote a best-selling book detailing the numerous communications and the evidence to verify them that saw 10 editions by 1926.

Lodge was convinced of his son's discarnate survival and that "elimination of ordinary telepathy from the living, except under the far-fetched hypothesis of the unconscious influence of complete strangers, was exceptionally complete". However, in his conclusions he wrote: "It may be asked, do I recommend all bereaved persons to devote the time and attention which I have done to getting communications and recording them? Most certainly I do not... I recommend people in general to learn and realise that their loved ones are still active and useful and interested and happy—more alive than ever in one sense—and to make up their minds to live a useful life until they rejoin them". (See *Raymond, Or Life After Death* (1916) reissued as *Raymond Revised*, 1922, and thanks also to Graham Wheeldon and Dave Gordon.)

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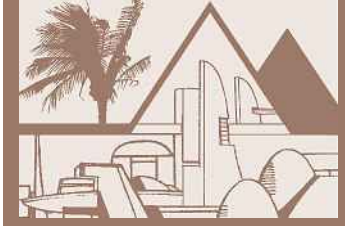


MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **Paul Devereux**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

AAPAME

ABOVE: One of the giant rings found in the Jordanian desert. **BELOW:** The Bronze age sundial decorated with a pattern of small round holes corresponding with sunrises at the equinoxes and solstices. **BOTTOM:** Rock art in the desert of southern New Mexico may be linked with hallucinogenic plants growing beneath the painted panels.

BIG CIRCLES...

About a dozen giant rings formed by low banks of uncut rocks have been identified in Jordanian desert areas, as well as at least one in Syria, near Homs. Some were noted as long ago as the 1920s, but others are more recent discoveries – some by satellite imagery. These curious circular features range in diameter from 720ft to 1,490ft (220-455m) and are thought to have been built, variously, over an extensive period from c.4000 BC up to Roman times. Some of the stone rings are only roughly circular, but others were laid out with geometrical precision.

There are gaps in the perimeter of many of the rings, but Professor David Kennedy from the University of Western Australia, who has been managing the Aerial Archæology in Jordan Project (AAJ), says that most of them are probably secondary to the original structures. There are suggestions that the circles were originally for corralling or capturing roaming herds of animals by long-ago nomads, but the purpose of the Jordanian circles is not, actually, known as yet. Studies continue. *Daily Mail Online, 30 Oct 2014.*

...LITTLE CIRCLES

In 2013, archæoastronomer Larisa Vodolazhskaya and her team from the Southern Federal University in Russia discovered an object in the Ukraine that they determined was a Bronze Age sundial. Alerted by this find, archæologists in Rostov, Russia, drew renewed attention to a similar-looking object found in a Kurgan site (Srubna) in 1991. This stone slab had covered a grave and dates back c.3,000 years. It is decorated with small round holes arranged in a pattern about 13in (33cm) across. By studying their geometry, Vodolazhskaya and colleagues discovered that some of the carved circles, used as sockets for a moveable mini-gnomon,

correspond with the sunrises at the equinoxes and solstices. Moreover, the researchers claim that the circles/sockets that didn't correspond to solar movements were linked to two significant points in the 18.6-year lunar cycle – namely, the lunar "standstills" (the northernmost and southernmost moonrises, in effect the lunar "solstices"). It is claimed that when viewed appropriately with a gnomon in moonlight, two of the circular hollows in the Rostov slab can apparently indicate these two points. Clever Bronze Age stuff, if the claims are accurate. *arXiv.org 14 Oct., Discovery Newsletter, 16 Oct 2014*.

TRIBAL TRIPPING

Dozens of ancient pictogram rock art sites recently recorded by archæologists in the Chihuahuan Desert in southern New Mexico are indicating a probable link with hallucinogenic tobacco and datura (jimson weed) plants that grow directly beneath the painted rock panels, which always display arrays of mainly red and black triangular motifs. The tobacco, sometimes called "coyote tobacco", isn't like the modern commercial variety but is so strong that heavy smoking of it can induce trance (with prolonged use, it also, weirdly, sensitises the retina enabling hunters to see better in twilight conditions), and datura is a powerful and dangerous hallucinogen known to have been used widely in the Southwest by pre-Hispanic Indians, either smoked or in an infusion (see *The Long Trip* by your columnist). The research has been conducted by Dr Lawrence Ludendorff, president of the archæological firm Sacred Sites Research, and colleagues.

It is not entirely clear whether the rock art was produced at sites where such mind-altering plants happen to grow particularly profusely, or where they were

deliberately planted – or rather, as the researchers seem to think, were seeded accidentally by shamans who produced the pictograms and who brought the plants to the sites so as to enable entrance to the spirit world. Pottery shards thought to belong to the Jornada Mogollon, a culture that occupied the region c. AD 500-1500, have also been found at some of these sites. *Western Digs, 17 Oct 2014*.

In his own wanderings in this remote region, your columnist found ancient Mimbres Indian rock art (carvings) that were clearly shamanic – bear shamans, in fact – depicting among other things ritual activity and strongly indicating that the Mimbres, at least, used mushrooms (see *Haunted Land*).

SOUNDS FAMILIAR

The *Daily Telegraph* of 29 October went big ("Could Stonehenge have been built to give ritual dancers sound effects?") apparently based on a presentation given by Steven Waller at a meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in Indianapolis (27-31 October). Waller spoke about the reflection of soundwaves (i.e. echoes) at rock art and megalithic sites, and how prehistoric people viewed this as supernatural. Waller's work is good, but it would be nice if journalists could contextualise their stories a bit more than they tend to do. As it happens, this "news" is slightly old hat – your columnist doesn't want to keep shamelessly citing his own books, but Waller's work was described in *Stone Age Soundtracks* (www.pauldevereux.co.uk) back in 2001!

Not only that, the journalist failed to give a reference to the more comprehensive acoustic work of David Keating and Aaron Watson at Stonehenge (and elsewhere) in the mid-late 1990s, and the work on (what has later turned out to be brain-affecting) resonance inside selected prehistoric sites in the same period by the International Consciousness Research Laboratories (www.ICRL.org) team, which was written up for the Journal of the very same Acoustical Society of America, as it happens. And more unforgivably, because of its recent date and the publicity it caused, the journalist failed to cite the paper earlier this year by this columnist and Jon Wozencroft on the sonic stones at the source of the Stonehenge bluestones (see *Time & Mind* vol.7, no.1; **FT310:18-19**).

The point is, these stories appear haphazardly in the mainstream press often without providing the reader with the tools to see the joined-up picture of a moving wave of research.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

183: MOB-HANDED

(The ultimate comment on lynching remains Billie Holiday's hauntingly elegiac 'Strange Fruit')

Ancient lynchings began with the limb-from-limb rending of pop star Orpheus by frenzied Greek bobby-soxers, an episode reworked in Euripides's *Bacchæ*. Juvenal (Sixth Satire) descants on the violent emotions of Roman groupies at concerts.

Athenian lawgiver Draco (whence 'draconian': **FT183:18**) fell victim to an accidental friendly lynching, being so thickly showered with coats and cushions that he was suffocated (*Suda* D1495) – But how did you enjoy the play, Mrs Draco?

Canine lynchings, too: irreverent authors Euripides and Lucian were both torn to pieces by marauding Rovers.

Republican Roman radical politician-brothers Tiberius and Caius Gracchus suffered similar fates (details in Plutarch's *Lives*). Tiberius was beaten to death by a senatorial gang with planks and sticks. Caius's clubbing was preceded by the mass stabbing of supporter Antyllus with long-nibbed pens – he got the point.

To increase the bounty based on the weight of Caius's head, the cunning claimant scooped out its brains, replacing them with molten lead.

With cognate dexterity, since the decapitated bonce of lynched emperor Galba (AD 69) was bald, its carrier managed by hooking his thumb through the mouth (Suetonius, *Galba*, ch20 para4).

One consequence of Cæsar's fateful game of Ides and Seek (**FT221:23**) was the lynching of the wrong Cinna: "Tear him to pieces. He's a conspirator." "I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet." "Tear him for his bad verses." – Bill Shakespeare's tearful lines, *JC* 3.3.31-4.

Ancient Egyptians would not have been content with Tahir Square. Diodorus Siculus (*Universal History*, bk1 ch83 paras8-9) describes the lynching of a Roman for accidentally killing a sacred cat – a man of uncertain felines. Philo (*Against Flaccus*, para44) accuses that Roman governor of organising the first recorded pogroms against Jews in AD 40 at Alexandria.

Centuries later (AD 415) in that same city, egged on by Bishop Cyril, a mob of monks (ironically, lay-healers) lynched the sexagenarian Neo-Platonist philosopher Hypatia (a dashing beauty in her day; cf. Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, 1995): "Her flesh was scraped from her bones with sharp oyster shells, and her quivering limbs were delivered to the flames" – Gibbon, ch47, based on Socrates's *Church History*, bk7 ch15, and John of Nikiu's *Chronicle*, ch84 paras 87-103.

In light of this, one is entitled to savour comparable episcopal mobbings. Bishop George of Cappadocia was kicked to death on Christmas Eve, AD 361. Gibbon (ch23), perhaps with tongue in cheek, exploiting both pagan and Christian sources, took delight in equating this former fraudulent bacon-dealer with St George of England – try telling that to our nation's football fans.

In AD 443, the disgraced courtier-poet Cyrus of Panopolis (cf. Alan Cameron, 'The Empress & the Poet,' *Yale Classical Studies* 27, 1982, 217-90) was forcibly episcopated and sent to Cotyæum as its new bishop. His inaugural sermon was instantly famous, consisting as it did of a single sentence ending with an emphatic *Amen!* As Cameron remarks, the congregation was "evidently too taken aback to lynch him" – as they had his four predecessors. Perhaps they were simply grateful for such unaccustomed pulpit brevity.

Via a bionic leap forward in time, we end with Giuseppe Prina, beaten to death in Milan (20 April 1814) in a riot known as 'The Battle of the Umbrellas' (cf. Tim Heald, *My Dear Hugh: Letters from Richard Cobb to Hugh Trevor-Roper*, 2011, 10) – a fate that should have befallen Steve 'The Wally with the brolly' Mclaren.

"I ain't seen one good lynchin' in years" – Tom Lehrer, 'Dixie'

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

A fall of angel hair, penises trapped or seemingly stolen, plus hysterical fainters and lucky drifters

ANGEL HAIR [FT106:18]

A rain of mysterious strands of wispy, white 'angel hair' fell from the sky in Portugal late last October, and was actually filmed falling (http://travel.aol.co.uk/2014/11/27/ufo-rains-angel-hair-portugal-video).

"It fell during the afternoon," said a local, who did not want to be named. "I tried to inquire if aeroplanes flew over before, but no straight answer. It happened two weekends in a row. A couple of friends and I sent it to be analysed – and the weirdest things happened. It reacts to ultraviolet light. It comes alive." An earlier fall of angel hair in Portugal occurred on 2 November 1959 in the city of Évora. It was collected and analysed by armed forces technicians and scientists of the University of Lisbon, who concluded it was produced by a small insect or a single-celled organism of some kind.

On 20 October 2014, about the same time as the latest Portuguese angel hair fall, another took place in Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka. Similar sightings of strands falling from the sky have been reported in Finland and Canada, among many other places – but the samples often evaporate before they can be properly analysed. However, spectrographic analysis of material collected from an angel hair incident in Venice in 1954 revealed that it contained boron, silicon, calcium, and magnesium; aside from its composition, researchers were unable to determine what it was. Conspiracy theorists believe angel hair could be related to UFO propulsion systems – or even to 'chemtrails', sinister biological agents supposedly distributed by aircraft around the world. Researcher Allan J Manak of the United Aerial Phenomena Agency catalogued 65 falls of angel hair from AD 679 to 1977,

LEFT: The wisps of 'angel hair' caught on video in Portugal last October.

but failed to provide accurate references [**FT78:62**].

Nigel Watson, old pal of the Gang of Fort and author of the *Haynes Manual for UFO Investigations*, said: "Sightings of UFOs were commonly associated with angel hair up to the 1970s, and in the past it has been seen in association with religious visions in the sky, such as in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917. These fine fibres falling from the sky were regarded as being the by-product of UFO propulsion systems, although sceptics tend to explain them as being created by migrating spiders or by dust particles polarised by atmospheric electricity. It is only in recent years that angel hair sightings have returned again. Samples quickly evaporate making it difficult to analyse their composition and nature." *Gossip Lanka, Oct; Metro, openminds.tv, 26 Nov; Int. Business Times (Australia), 2014.*

GETTING STUCK IN [FT314:14]

An embarrassed couple had to be separated by medics after getting attached to each other while indulging in some submarine coitus at Porto San Giorgio in Italy. Suffering *penis captivus* (trapped todger) in front of a beach full of sunbathers, they made their way to the shore and were taken by ambulance to hospital where the woman was injected with a muscle relaxant. This episode qualifies as a strange phenomenon, since victims of *penis captivus* generally have trouble disengaging for only a few seconds. *Sun, 14 Oct 2014.*

PURLOINED PENIS PANIC [FT273:10]

Christopher Steven Kenyon, 27, of Napier Close, St Helens, Merseyside, was convinced his ex-girlfriend had "stolen his genitals". Such a delusion seems to occur regularly in West Africa, but this is the first time news of an English case has been received at Fortean Towers. At Liverpool Crown Court in June 2013, Kenyon was convicted of "putting a person in fear" contrary to anti-harassment laws, and was confined indefinitely to a mental hospital. At the Criminal Appeal Court in London in December 2014, he failed in his appeal to be released. Lord Justice McCombe said he would only be freed on the say-so of the Secretary of State for Justice. It is not explained why a self-examination couldn't cure the poor man of his delusion. *Liverpool Echo, 14 Dec 2014.*

DAZED AND CONFUSED [FT316:36-40]

On 20 November 2014, classes were suspended at Don Vicente Rama National High School in Basak-Pardo, Cebu City, Philippines, when 21 (or 35) students succumbed to crying jags, screams, fainting and uncontrolled shaking. Parents suspected spirit possession, and some were taken to Talisay City to see Msgr. Frederick Kriekenbeek, the official exorcist for the archdiocese of Cebu. "Our conclusion is that this was an ordinary case of mass hysteria," said councillor Dave Tumulak, chairman of the Cebu City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, who called in government social workers to give the girls a psychological debriefing. He asked school officials to excuse the girls from classes for two days and to restrict outdoor activities. He said the school had already had two incidents of "possession" in 2014.

The students were brought to the district health centre for a medical check-up. Some were shaking in fear and shouting; others were carried in the arms of family members. Their vital signs were normal, apart from raised pulse rates. The girls had participated in a girl scouts camp over the weekend. "They had a tiring weekend and the weather was hot," said Tumulak. "They were sharing some stories at camp and it may have affected them." He speculated that they had "created their own scenarios", drawing on superstitious beliefs.

In separate interviews, some girls said they saw images of a family of three being brutally killed. "I saw them being massacred. They had very red eyes like fire," one student said. Another student said the "spirits" were angry after some students accidentally hit a tree on Friday night, 14 November. One report said that two sisters claimed to be possessed by spirits which their mother believed was linked to two mango trees being cut down near the school.

Some students pointed to third year student Ana (not her real name) as the one who was initially "possessed" before other girls started acting in a bizarre fashion. Ana, who said she was encountering "a family

problem", was immediately isolated and taken home. Six students – including Ana – had been showing signs of hysteria since Sunday, 16 November, the last day of camp. The next day, six more students got "possessed" while attending classes. More followed between 9am and 10am. Ana's actions were already unusual at 8am. "She would suddenly flare up and she was so stiff when we tried to calm her down," said a third year student. Ambrosia Cabalida, mother of a 13-year-old student, said she didn't want her child to join the camp because of a "supernatural occurrence" last October in the same campsite. "We didn't want her to join the camp, but her teacher insisted that she join," said Cabalida. "Who would have known this would happen?" *The Freeman (Manila), 21 Nov; mysteriousuniverse.org, 25 Nov; newsinfo.inquirer.net, 28 Nov 2014.*

HIGH SEAS DRIFTERS [FT312:20-21]

Two men from Papua New Guinea survived almost five months adrift in the Pacific in a tiny open motorboat by eating raw fish and drinking rainwater. They had weathered a number of severe storms and had drifted at least 1,000 miles (1,600km). Michael Bolong, 54, and his nephew Ambros Wavut, 28, believed to be construction workers rather than fishermen, were finally rescued by a fishing vessel on 23 November and landed on Pohnpei in Micronesia's Caroline Islands. They had tried in vain for months to catch the attention of passing ships. They were suffering from severe sunburn but were otherwise surprisingly well. "We were convinced that everyone had given up looking for us," said Bolong. A third man – Francis Dimansol, 48 – had been in the boat, but had not survived. The trio had set off from Lihir Island, New Ireland, in July, heading for a nearby island, but they were caught in a storm and ran out of fuel. *D.Telegraph, 6 Dec 2014.*

A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

G J WILLIAMS

TWO-TRUNKS GOES ON DISPLAY

The 'Ripley's Believe It Or Not' Museums, Odditoriums, and Warehouses of Oddities, of which there are many spread across the USA and worldwide, contain some truly remarkable exhibits. Few, however, are more extraordinary than the preserved head of an adult male African elephant that sports two fully formed trunks, located side by side in the centre of its nasal region. Of course, sceptics may dismiss it as being just a cleverly-constructed fake, but Ripley's have apparently claimed that DNA samples taken from both trunks have confirmed that they are indeed from the same individual elephant.

Given its astonishing appearance, it is strange that 'Two-Trunks' has not attracted a great deal more attention than it has done, as its very existence is by no means well known (but I have sought to remedy this situation by documenting it in my ShukerNature blog). However, interested viewers had the chance to observe this bi-nasal wonder recently, when on 19 November 2014 it was placed on public display at the IAAPA (International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions) 2014 Convention in Florida. And earlier in the year, it had been exhibited by the Ripley's Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. My grateful thanks to Mr GJ Williams and Ms Patty Harbort for this information, and also to Mr Williams for kindly permitting me to include one of his pre-convention photographs of Two-Trunks here.

GJ Williams, pers. comms, 19 Nov; Patty Harbort, pers. comm., 10 Nov 2014; http://karlshuker.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/two-trunks-meet-humphrey.html 26 Nov 2010.

A BEE-LINE FOR THE IOW

The European bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, one of Europe's most beautiful birds, typically spends its summers in the warm Mediterranean region and is normally just a rare summer visitor to the UK. Apart from a pair that produced two chicks in County Durham in 2002, the last breeding record for the UK was back in 1955, when two pairs of this multicoloured species raised seven chicks in Sussex. However, these records have now been emphatically broken by the creation of a veritable mini-colony of bee-eaters on the Isle of Wight. In early summer 2014, two adult pairs arrived there from southern Africa, and between them have successfully hatched and raised eight chicks, bringing the total number of bee-eaters on the IOW to 12 – the largest breeding group ever recorded anywhere in the British Isles. They have since departed for southern Africa where this kingfisher-related species overwinters, but it is hoped that they will all return to the IOW in summer 2015, together with mates, and breed again, especially if our climate remains relatively mild, thereby breaking the 2014 record for breeding numbers and chicks hatched in the UK. *D.Mail, 2 Sept 2014.*

BURSTING FOR A BUSTARD

While on the subject of exotic rare birds in the British Isles: in November 2014, a great bustard *Otis tarda* was spotted and photographed on the island of Alderney in the Channel Islands. This is the first time that this very large, crane-related species (and one of the world's heaviest flying birds) has ever been recorded on Alderney, and the first time in 130 years that it has been recorded anywhere in the Channel Islands. *'Visit Alderney' Facebook page, 19 Nov 2014.*

BLACK AND WHITE AND RARE ALL OVER

In many parts of the Far East, but particularly in Thailand and Burma (Myanmar), white elephants are revered for their beauty, their great rarity, and the good fortune that they allegedly bring. So it is not often that such individuals are ever overshadowed by any other form of elephant, but on this occasion they have been, quite literally – thanks to the presence among them of a young jet-black elephant. The white elephants in question are a herd of five Burmese specimens that were all captured in the wild between 2001 and 2010 and, befitting their status as sacred animals, have been housed ever since in a special enclosure near the Uppatasanti Pagoda in Burma's new capital city, Naypyitaw. Now they share their enclosure with an equally eye-catching baby black elephant, recently captured in the wild and seemingly melanistic. Black elephants often feature in classic Mughal artwork, but are exceedingly rare in modern-day Asia. *dailymail.co.uk, 11 Nov 2014.*

RESURRECTIONS

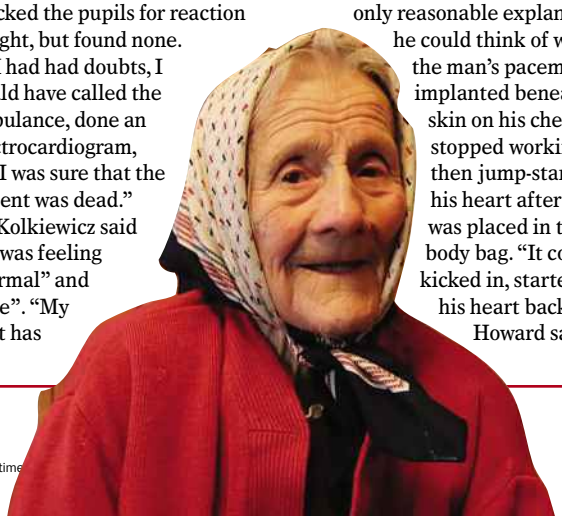
THE POLISH PENSIONER WHO WOKE UP IN A BODY BAG, THE WOMAN WHO STOPPED BREATHING FOR TWO HOURS AND OTHER TALES OF THE LIVING DEAD

According to the Daily Telegraph, *"Just 38 cases of Lazarus syndrome, or return of circulation after failure of CPR, have been reported worldwide since it was first described in 1982." Since the Gang of Fort receives about a dozen reports of such resurrections every year, it seems that this figure should be much higher.*

• Janina Kolkiewicz, 91, woke up in a body bag after being declared dead and kept in a morgue's cold storage room for 11 hours. On 6 November, her niece Bogumila Kolkiewicz, 54, noticed that she wasn't breathing and called the family doctor, Wieslawa Czyz, to the house in the eastern Polish town of Ostrow Lubelski. Finding no pulse, Dr Czyz, 47, declared Mrs Kolkiewicz dead, wrote out her death certificate, and two hours later sent her body to the mortuary while her niece planned her funeral, which was set for two days later. Shortly before midnight, an undertaker who brought in another body noticed that Ms Kolkiewicz was moving inside the bag she had been placed in. Once it was opened, she complained of being cold and asked for hot tea. She was treated for dehydration and given a blood transfusion before returning home, where her niece gave her two pancakes and a bowl of hot soup.

"I was sure she was dead," said Dr Czyz. "I'm stunned, I don't understand what happened." She said she checked for a pulse on a forearm and neck arteries, listened for a heartbeat and the sound of breathing, and checked the pupils for reaction to light, but found none. "If I had had doubts, I would have called the ambulance, done an electrocardiogram, but I was sure that the patient was dead." Ms Kolkiewicz said she was feeling "normal" and "fine". "My aunt has no inkling of what happened since she has late-stage dementia," said her niece. *[AP] dailymail.co.uk, BBC News, 14 Nov; Sun, 15 Nov 2014.*

• On 26 February, Dexter Howard, the coroner of Holmes County, Mississippi, was called to the home of Walter Williams, 78, by a hospice nurse, who said the old farmer had passed away. He checked for vital signs, found none, and declared him dead at 9pm. The body was taken to Porter and Sons Funeral Home in Lexington and was being prepared for embalming when workers noticed the supposedly dead man kicking in his zipped-up body bag. It was around 2.30am, five and a half hours after he had been declared dead. Mr Williams was taken to hospital for treatment and was allowed home after a few days, but died for real on 14 March. Mr Howard said he had never seen anything like this in more than two decades as a coroner. The only reasonable explanation he could think of was that the man's pacemaker, implanted beneath the skin on his chest, had stopped working and then jump-started his heart after he was placed in the body bag. "It could've kicked in, started his heart back," Howard said.



She was kept in a morgue's cold storage for 11 hours

"The bottom line is it's a miracle." *BBC News, 28 Feb; [CNN] 1 Mar; heraldsun.com.au, 15 Mar 2014.*

• Funeral staff in Naivasha, Kenya, "took to their heels screaming" after a corpse they were about to embalm "woke up" and started breathing heavily and crying out for help. Paul Mutora, 24, had tried to kill himself by swallowing insecticide, and was pronounced dead on 8 January 2014. Mutora's father and other relatives visited the morgue the following morning to view the body and then returned home to start funeral arrangements, but in the afternoon they were told he was still alive. Dr Joseph Mburu, the superintendent in charge of Naivasha District Hospital, said the drug used to treat Mutora slowed his heartbeat, which might have led to the mistake. Mutora was later photographed recovering in the lakeside town, 56 miles (90km) north-west of the capital, Nairobi. *BBC News, 10 Jan 2014.*

• Ann Savile, 71, who had leukaemia, was declared dead by three doctors after efforts to revive her apparently failed at St James's Hospital in Leeds in February. When her partner John Harrison came in to view her body, he found her breathing. She lived for another four months. Mr Harrison, 58, planned to sue Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust, saying she should never have been left in a room for three hours while struggling for life. *Sunday Mirror, 9 Mar; D.Mirror, D.Telegraph, 2 Aug 2014.*

LEFT: Walter Williams was found live and kicking in a zipped-up body bag. **BELOW:** 91-year-old Janina Kolkiewicz.

• Valdelucio Goncalves, 54, was diagnosed with terminal cancer and was taken to Menandro de Farias Hospital in Salvador, Brazil, because he was fighting for breath. On 23 August he was declared dead after "respiratory and multiple organ failure". The following morning his brother Walterio went to the morgue to dress his body for the funeral, and noticed him "wriggling" in the body bag. The staff had to rush to free him: his body had been tied up and his nose and ears filled with cotton wool. His niece, Patricia Cintra, said the family was not only mortified but had paid for everything. "We had even bought a coffin and paid a deposit for the funeral," she said.

Goncalves can't speak, but he wrote a letter claiming that he was brought back from death by a Brazilian saint. "I, Valdelucio, saw death at my feet, but my faith was so great that I was cured," he wrote. "Before Irma Dulce I said, do a miracle in me, and she heard my prayer. I saw my mother telling me, son, hold onto her and you will be saved." *Huffington Post, 27 Aug 2014.*

• On 23 September, Ruby Graupera-Cassimiro, 40, suddenly collapsed in Boca Raton Regional Hospital, Florida, after a successful caesarean section to deliver her first child, a daughter, and went more than two hours

without breathing. For the last 45 minutes she was without a pulse while doctors and nurses worked tirelessly to revive her with chest compressions and defibrillators. All hope lost, they were preparing to call the family in to say goodbye when the "impossible" happened, leaving medical professionals at a loss to explain, other than to call it "divine providence". The heart monitor began to blip just as suddenly as it had stopped.

The Deerfield Park woman's unexpected heart failure was due to a rare amniotic fluid embolism, a serious condition in which the uterine fluid flows into the mother's bloodstream and reaches her heart, causing a vacuum effect that stops circulation. The condition is sudden and unpredictable, often not diagnosed until the mother's death. Doctors were hard put to cite the odds of Graupera-Cassimiro's survival, saying only that revival after 45 minutes without a pulse is almost unheard of.

The resurrected woman did not immediately realise what had happened, believing that she was waking up after the surgery. She related what she thought at the time was a dream of her late father telling her it was not her time because she was needed and had to go back. Later, it occurred to her that the experience was not a dream but an NDE (near-death experience). When obstetrician Dr Michael Fleischer who delivered her daughter, Taily, was removing the breathing tube, she told him that dying was nothing to be afraid of. She returned home less than a month later without a trace of side effects. *[AP] 10 Nov; Liberty Voice, 11 Nov 2014.*

• A World War I resurrection lies behind the story of Lassie, the all-American icon and cinematic superdog immortalised in *Lassie Come Home* (1943), nine subsequent Hollywood films and 300 television shows. On New Year's Day 1915, the battleship *Formidable* was sunk by a German submarine off Start Point, South Devon, with the loss of more than 500 men. The body of Able Seaman John Cowan was found floating on a life raft off Lyme Regis two days later. With no signs of a heartbeat, the sailor was laid out with two other bodies in the cellar of the Pilot Boat, a local pub.

Lassie, the landlord's rough-haired crossbreed collie, followed the bearers into the cellar and refused to leave Cowan's body. She licked his face and nuzzled his body and head for more than half an hour. The "dead" sailor stirred and was taken to hospital, where he made a full recovery. The heart-warming tale of Lassie – then an unusual name for a dog – was headline news around the world, and would almost certainly have come to the attention of Yorkshireman Eric Knight, then a serviceman in America, who "invented" Lassie over 20 years later [**FT143:10**].

The last round-up of the "Lazarus phenomenon" was in **FT306:8-9**.

ABOVE: Medical staff had no explanation for Ruby Graupera-Cassimiro's return to life.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

184: HOT AIR

HUNT EMERSON

The myth

During hot weather, leaving a fan on in an empty room will make the room cooler. Because that's what fans do: they cool the air by... um... by... er... by moving it around... ?

The "truth"

Well, exactly. When you start to think about it, how could warm air be cooled by simply stirring it about a bit? The answer, of course, is that it couldn't. Fans do not make air cooler. In a closed room, a fan can't change the overall temperature – except that, in theory, it might make it a tiny bit warmer, through the heat given off by its motor. But what fans can do is make people cooler, by means of evaporation and convection. Any breeze, natural or artificial, passing across our skin will make our sweat evaporate more effectively – thus cooling us down. At the same time, the fan's breeze pushes the air that's closest to your body (which has become warm from its proximity to your hot bod) away from you, so that it's replaced by cooler air, which can then take its turn in removing heat from you.

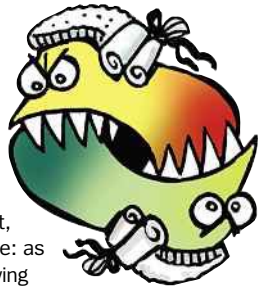
Sources

http://mentalfloss.com/article/57774/how-does-fan-work-cool-you; www.newton.dep.anl.gov/askasci/phy00/phy00393.htm

Disclaimer

Rather surprisingly, the subject of room fans turns out to be somewhat controversial. If you think we've got this all wrong, do feel free to let off steam on the letters page.

Mythchaser



There is no such thing as "compensation culture," a correspondent tells this column. The whole idea that people in modern Britain (and perhaps elsewhere?) are ready to sue the arses off official bodies, commercial companies, and each other, at the slightest provocation is entirely invented by the media and their pet politicians. In fact, figures show that the precise opposite is true: as a nation, we are suing less often, and receiving less in compensation. Can any number-crunching FT reader confirm or refute this?

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NECROLOG

This issue, we bid farewell to the former Ghost Club stalwart who was the last remaining link to the era of Harry Price and is fondly remembered despite various spats with rivals

PETER UNDERWOOD COLLECTION / THE GHOST CLUB

LEFT: Portrait of a young ghost hunter.

PETER UNDERWOOD

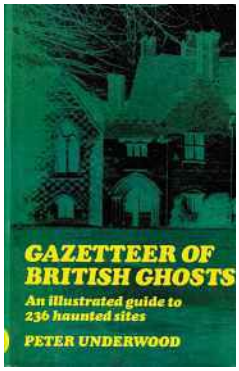
Peter Underwood was the last of the great British ghost hunters, with experience stretching back to the far-off 1940s. His work consistently evoked the gentlemanly and exclusive atmosphere of pre-War investigations. The author of some 50 books, almost all on ghosts or psychic topics, he often stated he had heard more first-hand ghost stories than any man alive owing to his presidency from 1960 to 1993 of the Ghost Club.

He became interested in ghosts as a child after hearing his grandparents' home at Sarratt was haunted and began collecting stories and press cuttings. On joining the Army in 1942, he was sent for training to West Suffolk, where he was briefly based at the now-demolished moated manor house of Rushbrooke Hall, hearing a strange sound on the night a ghost was said to manifest. However, after collapsing on a rifle range, he was declared unfit for military service and later moved into publishing work.

In 1947 he was present at what was termed the first official investigation into a haunting conducted by the Luton Rating Assessment Committee at a house supposedly haunted by Dick Turpin or his victims at Apsley Guise, Bedfordshire. He made his first visit to Borley in Essex, the site of the notorious Borley Rectory, which was to fascinate him for the rest of his life. He applied to Borley investigator Harry Price (1881–1948) to join the Ghost Club and was immediately accepted. However, Price died unexpectedly soon afterwards and activities were suspended until December 1952, when Philip Paul and Percival Seward revived the club. Unfortunately, there was an almost immediate a split within the organising committee (see *Some Unseen Power*, 1985, by Philip Paul), but Underwood carried on. In 1960 he became its president, running the club much in the style of Price, carrying out investigations and visits to upmarket haunted locations, and arranging after-dinner talks. Following the example of Price, who used the Reform Club, Underwood encouraged readers to write to him at London's Savage Club, which he had joined in 1966. The Savage, Constitutional, Oriental and National Liberal clubs all hosted Ghost Club meetings over four decades, with a wide range of speakers on paranormal and esoteric topics addressing invitation-only gatherings. In later years, he emphasised the Club's Victorian antecedents rather than Price's declining posthumous reputation to gain access to many prestigious sites. Following techniques laid down in Price's booklet for Borley observers, these were seldom high-tech exercises (he never embraced the electronic gadgetry deployed today). A favourite investigation was into the haunting of Langenhoe Church, Essex, where the rector, Canon Merryweather, encountered apparitions and poltergeist incidents for over a decade.

Details of some of his investigations were later included in his influential *A Gazetteer of British Ghosts* (1971), reviving the tradition of ghostly guidebooks from the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, splicing legends about ancient castles, stately homes and ruined abbeys with up-to-date reports of haunting. The book was a success and the following year he boldly quit his secure job in publishing to pursue his own career as full-time author. It was a decision he never regretted, and the next year he produced *Haunted London* (1973), followed by gazetteers of Scottish, Irish and Welsh ghosts.

His style of re-telling many classic ghost stories, coupled with his own observations, reminiscences and anecdotes, often of famous people he had encountered or claimed to have met, became a distinctive aspect of these and later books. They had great popular appeal, certainly being in marked contrast to the increasingly statistical and laboratory-based approach taken by parapsychology.



His long experience in publishing gave him an instinct for shifting public tastes, leading him to turn out books on whatever was fashionable in the esoteric market. During the 'Occult Explosion' of the early 1970s he wrote *Into the Occult* (1972), *Deeper into the Occult* (1974), and *Dictionary of the Supernatural*. When a vampire was rumoured to be prowling Highgate Cemetery he wrote *The Vampire's Bedside Companion* (1975). Other books covered dowsing, exorcism and reincarnation followed by regional ghost books. Rather off-field with these was *Life's A Drag*, an unauthorised biography of Danny La Rue, whilst *Horror Man: The Life of Boris Karloff* and a book on Jack the Ripper were less surprising. In February 1974 he was a guest speaker at the launch of the first ghost-hunting holiday weekend at York. Organised by John Mitchell, a local history teacher and guide, this novel occasion was the genesis of York's local ghost walk industry (see **FT234:16–17**) now replicated around the world, from New Orleans to Tasmania.

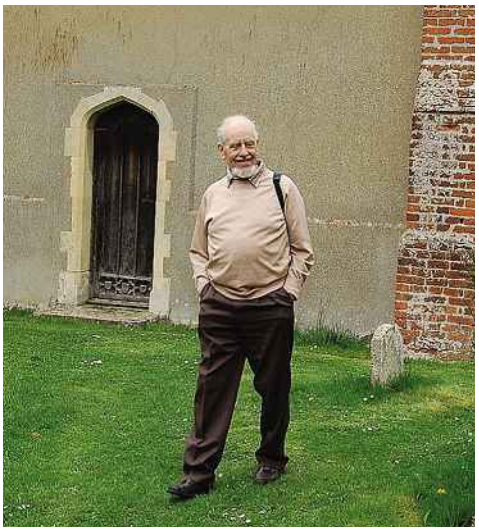
Though claiming membership of a wide range of organisations, Underwood preferred working independently, generally without reference to the theories of other researchers, seeking to find first-hand evidence that satisfied himself. He shared the secrets of his ghost hunter's toolkit in his books, most notably *The Ghost Hunter's Guide* (1984) and *The Ghost Hunters* (1985), though, aside from the Borley story, he cared as much for poltergeists as Harry Price, having come across several faked cases early in his career, and believing such manifestations would be solved "without recourse to the fourth dimension". Nonetheless, in one respect he was ahead of many psychical researchers in making connections between sexuality and psychic phenomena (once giving a lecture to the Society for Psychical Research where the title was changed from 'Sex and Psychic Phenomena' to 'The Erotic Element in Psychical Research'). His book *Into the Occult* contains an interesting chapter in an area that hitherto was politely ignored by many in psychical research, though it outraged some spiritualists.

Underwood continued to be fascinated by Borley long after most researchers had given up on the case, and his book *The Ghost of Borley* (1973) with Paul Tabori, the literary executor of Harry Price, introduced a new generation to the story. He returned to the subject many times, realising that the case increasingly revolved around the details of the lives of those who resided there as much as the ghosts and poltergeists. In this he was better placed than anyone to comment, having interviewed or contacted almost everyone who had lived at the Rectory from

1929 and nearly all the surviving witnesses. He was later filmed at Borley Church in the well-received BBC1 documentary *The Ghost Hunters*, broadcast in 1975. He produced *The Borley Postscript* (2002), consisting of unpublished material, and immediately saw through the spurious *We Faked The Ghosts of Borley Rectory* (2000) by Louis Mayerling (real name George Carter), a piece of imaginative fiction passed off as fact – which nonetheless duped the *Observer* (31 Dec 2000).

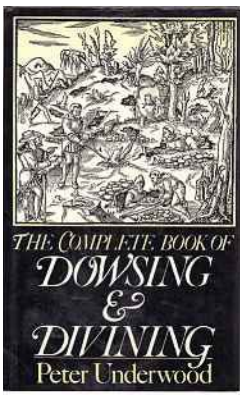
In publishing his own autobiography, *No Common Task* (1983), Underwood admitted errors. For example, in 1973 he was one of several victims of the 'Phantom Vicar of Wapping' hoax, dreamed up by author Frank Smyth and published as fact in *Man, Myth and Magic* in 1971. What he believed for some 25 years to be a powerful anti-vampire talisman given to him by the Revd Montague Summers turned out to be a fake, in fact being a specimen of what are known in the antiques trade as 'Billy and Charleys' forged by two Shadwell con-men in the late 1850s. Sometimes sources in his books changed over the years. For example in 1971 he stated that yachting author Dr Charles Sampson (1880–1941) had told him of seeing a phantom coach filled with skeletons crash into Potter Heigham Bridge on 31 May 1930. By 1996 in his *Peter Underwood's Ghosts and Haunted Places* his informant had changed to BBC broadcaster AJ Alan, who swore him to secrecy in his lifetime.

In his many years of investigation, Underwood admitted he had relatively few experiences. He heard unexplained footsteps at Elm Rectory near Wisbech in the 1940s, and on an investigation at ruined Minsden Chapel in Hertfordshire one Hallowe'en, he heard an unexplained snatch of music; his brother a short distance behind heard nothing. On a visit to the Spaniards Inn, Hampstead, allegedly haunted by Dick Turpin, he heard horses' hooves. Perhaps the most impressive auditory occurrence was in 1969, when he and Ghost Club Chairman Tom Perrott (1921–2010: obituary **FT311:24**) heard two raps from a wardrobe inside an empty bedroom of a house in Spencer Grove, Hackney, abandoned by its occupiers, the McGhee family, on account of apparitions, weird noises and fires. He believed he might also have seen the ghost of a recently deceased railwayman near his home in Hampshire, but did not realise it at the time.



LEFT: A return to Borley churchyard for the first time in 50 years.

Unfortunately, his independent approach and personalised take on psychic investigation often proved problematic in dealings with other researchers. At times he would react disproportionately against those whom he saw as rivals or who offended his sense of honour, frequently antagonising (often perhaps inadvertently) other researchers with sharp remarks in hostile-sounding letters published either in research journals or posted to them from the Savage Club. These often caused confusion as much as upset on the part of recipients, including some he had previously hailed as friends and fellow workers. For example, when Andrew MacKenzie rejected his theory that the famous 19th century 'Morton Ghost' at Cheltenham was a living woman, he sent a scalding letter to the SPR *Journal*. MacKenzie's reply began: "I seem to be out of favour with Mr Peter Underwood who was kind enough to describe me as an admirable researcher and a delightful friend [..] in his book *The Ghost Hunters"*. (*Journal* of the SPR, vol 55, July 1988).



Those he disagreed with strongly could be either blackballed from Ghost Club membership or sometimes "drummed out" as he termed it (See *Journal* of the SPR, vol 58, April 1992) or ignored completely. Some dissenters resigned and Andrew Green (1927–2004; obituary **FT189:26**), on whom he had originally been on friendly terms, asked not to be mentioned in any more of his books. With others, disputes rumbled on for many years, some being patched up, while other controversies only ended with the deaths of the other parties.

In 1993, following a clash with the late Commander Bill Bellars at the Ghost Club, he suddenly resigned as President, and the following year became the Life President of the similarly named Ghost Club Society established with his cousin Trevor Kenward. For a period he variously described the original Ghost Club as defunct or maintained that the Ghost Club Society was now the real continuation of the body, even producing a pamphlet of its 'history' to try and promote the idea. He published a rather more balanced book in 2010.

Following the death of his wife Joyce in 2003 he mellowed somewhat, and such outbursts came to be more sporadic, many coming to the view that elderly psychical researchers should best be forgiven for the errors into which they might creep in the intellectual loneliness of their twilight years.

Certainly, with a new generation of ghost hunters captivated by his books he could be most encouraging, helpful and inspirational. Together with Eddie Brazil and Paul Adams he produced the books *The Borley Rectory Companion* (2009), an indispensable encyclopædic guide for any student of the case, and *Shadows in the Nave* (2011) on haunted churches.

Of him, Eddie Brazil has written: "Peter Underwood was the King of Psychic Investigators and our last remaining link back to the time of Harry Price, smoky bow-tie Ghost Club dinners and ghost hunters in flannels. It is the end of an era."

Roger Clarke, author of *A Natural History of Ghosts* (2012), states: "Peter Underwood was a great friend to me when I first grew interested in ghosts… I think of him mostly as a folklorist and a man of fireside tales, for which I have a great fondness and susceptibility."

Darren Ritson author *In Search of Ghosts* (2008), wrote: "He was a legend. His dedication to ghost hunting was second to none". Rebecca Lang from Australia writes: "I corresponded with Peter several times, as have many people, about all things arcane and ghostly. He was generous with his time, and a gentleman to the last".

In 2009 Peter Underwood wrote to John Fraser, author of *Ghost Hunting: A Survivor's Guide:* "I always hoped during one of the ghost hunts I organised and supervised over the last 60 years that irrefutable proof would become evident of something existing after death, but I never found anything lasting, perhaps we are not meant to find it… I never encountered anything that proved life after death to my satisfaction. However I have had some truly remarkable and interesting experiences… and I am still hoping."

Peter Underwood, ghost hunter, born Letchworth, Hertfordshire 23 Mar 1923; died 26 Nov 2014, aged 91.

Alan Murdie

With thanks to Eddie Brazil, Roger Clarke, John Fraser, Rebecca Lang, and Darren Ritson.

EDDIE BRAZIL

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

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UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES REPORTS ON THE LATEST SIGHTING OF AN UNIDENTIFIED FLYING HUMANOID...

SUPERMAN VS AIRBUS

The British media had a field day over the weekend of 18-19 October when it was revealed that the crew of an Airbus passenger jet headed into Manchester Airport had experienced a close encounter with something over Macclesfield, Cheshire. But this was no ordinary UFO – it was a flying man, just metres from the aircraft's wingtips.

"Is it a bird, is it a plane?" asked the Superman-inspired *Daily Mail* headline. Within hours, paranormal websites were adopting the story, which – like the DC comics legend – was in danger of growing from Smallville to Metropolis proportions. But by chance I had witnessed the aircraft heading toward its confrontation, so I attempted to discover the truth and see if there was a precedent for flying entities.

I first accessed the official report – known as an 'airprox' – filed when a pilot fears the possibility of collision with an unidentified object. Many such reports do identify the conflicting traffic, but, of course, sometimes the cause is unresolved and a few of them match what might traditionally be considered UFOs. This latest airprox gives the aircraft type but does not identify the airline or flight – although I traced these details. The aircraft was an Airbus 320 inbound at just under 3,500ft (1,070m) at 14.36 (local time) on Friday 13 June 2014. The aircraft was headed east north east. The sighting lasted between three and four seconds and the object was seen by the pilot and first officer but, so far as is known, no passengers.

The cockpit crew say that the object was man-like in both appearance and size and passed them just left of their 12 o'clock position – approximately north east – estimated as 200-300ft (60-90m) above their altitude and a few hundred metres distant. The pilots had assumed it was a person below a parachute or hang glider, but neither crewmember was able to recall seeing any such structure. Because such canopies are significantly bigger than the person beneath them, the official report argues that these are unlikely causes.

Both witnesses also point out that their estimate of the figure being man-sized depends on their judgement of distance. If it was significantly further away, this 'man' would, of course, be larger, or conversely, if closer, then smaller. The air traffic controller confirmed to the jet that there was no other radar target nearby, despite coverage in this area being very good. However, radar settings can eliminate slower moving targets if set to optimise aircraft-like speeds.

My investigation quickly established other things not in the airprox report. Two aircraft were making a 'go-around' immediately prior to this incident. The first was a Boeing 738 arriving from Rome, the second the Airbus, operated by a major carrier and inbound from Greece. Both jets were on final approach to runway 23R when their first landing was aborted. The Boeing was at only 870ft (265m) and very near touchdown and the Airbus, then over Stockport at 1,785ft (544m). I saw the Airbus break off and climb upwards away from its landing path right over my house – hence my interest in this case. But I had no idea what followed just three minutes after the plane did its go-around.

Go-around movements into Manchester occur a handful of times a month for various reasons, such as a ground vehicle not clearing the runway. The manoeuvre involves the descending aircraft suddenly climbing off the glideslope and being sent around by the controllers in a long loop to start a new approach. The Boeing was sent to the north, meaning that the Airbus went south. This is why the aircraft now heading towards its close encounter was taking a non-standard path towards Macclesfield before heading back in over the Pennines.

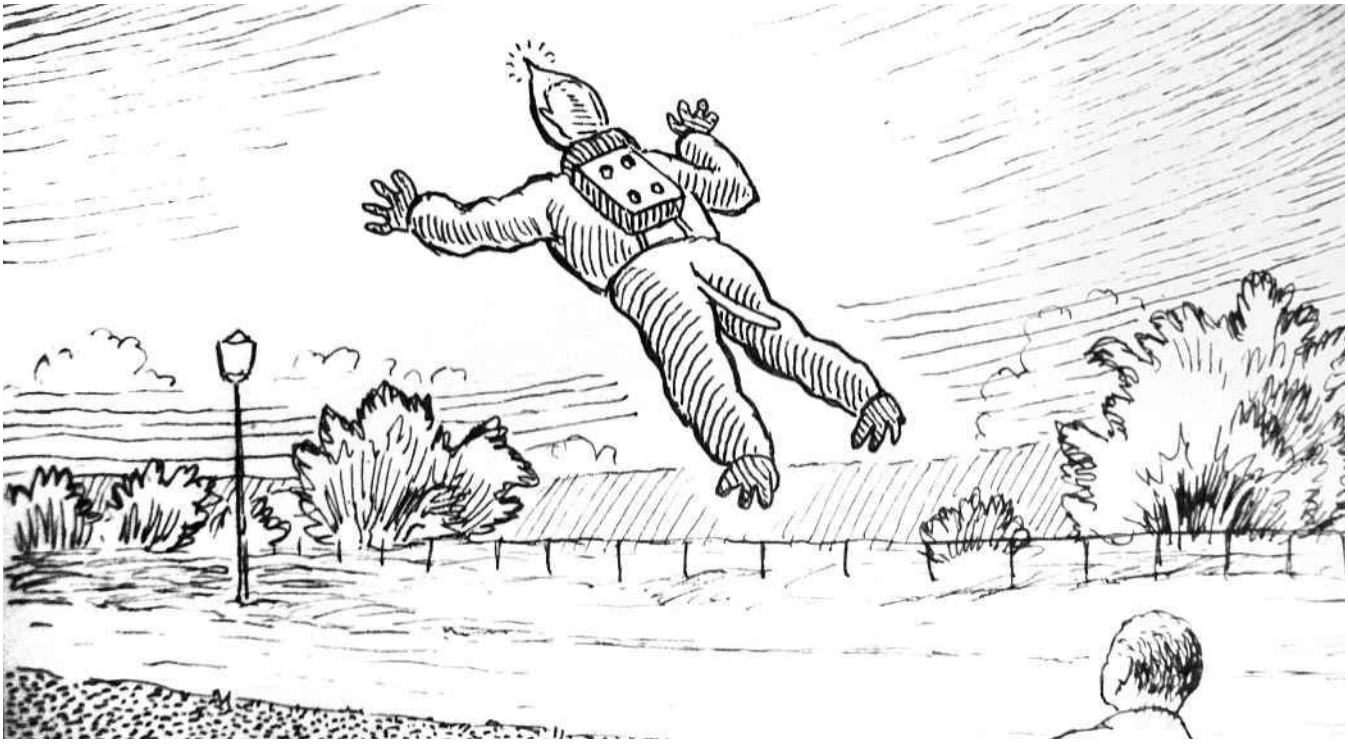
The Airbus climbed from 1,785ft during the go-around to just over 3,200ft (975m) when it turned east-north-east on the edge of Macclesfield. Then travelling at about 155 knots it was above the western edge of the Pennines, east of Bollington, heading back towards the glideslope. Normally aircraft passing here on approach are at about 7,000ft (2,130m), so this airbus would seem *very* low to someone below.

ALEXANDER TOMLINSON/ETIENNE

Both aircraft involved in these go-arounds landed normally on their second approach – although the Airbus was sent in ahead of the Boeing this time round. On their initial aborted approach from the south, six to eight minutes before the airprox, both these jets were routed east of Buxton – miles from where the later encounter happened.

Leading aviation safety expert Chris Yates first assessed the airprox incident and agreed that it was a puzzle, but, he told me that the most likely source was "a paraglider or some such that got in the way". If so, then the pilot was daring the risky winds that caused usual local flying sources not to operate that day; and would seem unlikely to admit this activity now, given the official investigation.

I considered another possibility: a mylar balloon. From the wind direction, and the fact that the aircraft was flying toward Lyme Park, a large National Trust estate near Disley, it was possible that such a balloon could have blown here.



ROY SANDBACH

LEFT: Roy Sandbach's illustration of the 1977 Puerto Rico incident. **OPPOSITE**: Alex Tomlinson's rendering of some 'rocketmen' for the cover of FT240.

Lyme Park held several events that week and could not rule this out for me as a possibility since many families wander their grounds; they even stage a kite festival, although not on the day in question.

Tests were conducted on similar large balloons by the American Federal Aviation authorities, worried about the threat to aircraft. They found that the balloons can reach over 3,000ft (914m), but then tend to lose upward lift and 'drift' before bursting. I discovered that just nine weeks earlier the local lifeboat launched a rescue mission near Errol in Scotland after getting witness reports that a parachutist had fallen into the water. In fact, this 'flying man' proved to be a £16.99 4 (1.2m) ft-tall human-shaped balloon in the design of Iron Man. So, does this offer a possible precedent for the Macclesfield incident?

Other candidates have come forward – though not very seriously. Mr Methane – a performing flatulist who entered *Britain's Got Talent* to "try to put the art into fart" (he went out, and so blew it) performs in a superhero costume and comes from Macclesfield. But even his prodigious emissions seem unlikely to be able to launch him to a height of over 3,000ft!

Slightly more plausible is Gary Connery, a famous stunt man who has appeared in Bond movies and doubled as the Queen leaping into the Olympic stadium during the London 2012 opening ceremony. He uses a wing suit with a Union Jack design to jump off cliffs or from aircraft and then 'glide' to earth. On his Facebook and Twitter accounts after this story broke he posted "Ha Ha" – and suggested that it had been him practising for an upcoming event he was organising. Connery has declined to confirm this and it appears most likely it was simply a joke. As a diving professional who saw one of his stunt pals killed recently, it seems very unlikely he would choose a location full of air traffic; and he could not possibly have known that an unusually low flight would see him that day because the unpredictable go-around had only occurred moments earlier.

A man and his daughter saw a small humanoid in an 'inflated' suit

I found other sightings in the UK on 13 June 2014. Two daylight (afternoon?) videos are on Youtube – both posted long before the Airbus case was known. One, from Putney, shows a small dot reflecting sunlight, which on close focus appears to be a tumbling roundish shape. This may well be a balloon. The other was taken in Amersham, on the London Heathrow flightpath, and even includes an aircraft passing by. The dark segmented tube alters its shape throughout, going from looking like a parachute canopy to a curve. The photographer does not claim it was a UFO – again, the images suggest a balloon, though it also resembles a caterpillar in some ways. These cases offer an interesting coincidence.

In conclusion, then, a rogue paraglider might have defied the dangerous conditions and misjudged the unexpectedly low altitude of this Airbus during its go-around. But there is no evidence for this. Circumstantially, a man-shaped balloon could have reached this location and height; but, again, there is no proof that one did.

So what of an actual non-human flying entity? There are some relevant UFO reports. In Quebradillas, Puerto Rico, on 12 July 1977 a man and his daughter observed a small humanoid in a green 'inflated' suit with a pointed helmet carrying a light atop. It had four fingers, a short tail and web-like feet. When the daughter switched on the outside light it grew scared and activated a backpack that made it climb upwards over a neighbouring farm and trees. The cows reacted to this by making a racket. An illuminated UFO was seen in this area by another local.

Cows also featured in a similar case at Cussac, France, on 29 August 1967. Here, some children with their dog went towards a group of 'youngsters' surrounding a silvery sphere. As they approached these beings they saw that they possessed large heads and pointed chins. Flying upwards, these beings then headed into the sphere, with the dog and cows now in a state of pandemonium as it departed.

Rather closer to Macclesfield, at Baddeley Green in Staffordshire, another young witness described climbing onto a storage heater to watch two small white-suited entities fly past his window and away. They wore visors and backpacks that appeared to help them 'fly' in a posture like swimming, but without them moving their arms and legs.

All of these cases were investigated by experienced UFO investigators who considered them credible. Whilst a simpler explanation for the Macclesfield flying man seems more likely, we can file these alien sightings just in case.

For more sightings of flying humanoids, see Peter Hassall, "Aeronauts from the Future", **FT240:34-39**.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

55 THE CITIES OF LOST CHILDREN

THEO PAIJMANS provides some valuable new context for an 1869 disappearance case discussed by Fort

Wrote Charles Fort: "In August, 1869, English newspapers reported disappearances of 13 children, in Cork, Ireland… It may be that the phenomenon cannot be explained in terms of local kidnappers, because somewhere else, at the same time, children were disappearing. *London Daily News*, August 31 – excitement in Brussels where children were disappearing." [1]

Fort used these and other cases to bolster his theory of teleportation, a word that he also coined. Studying the original sources on the children's disappearances in Cork and Brussels, an altogether different picture of the events emerges; but they also reveal a broadly felt hysteria, which Fort missed.

The case of the disappearing children in Cork was indeed widely reported in English, Scottish and Irish newspapers.[2] But we turn to the *Cork Examiner*, the newspaper of the city in which the events were said to have occurred. On 21 August, the paper reported that working class parents in Cork were in quite a panic, as in the last fortnight a number of little children had disappeared from their communities. "So numerous are the cases stated to have occurred that an extensive system of kidnapping seems the only possible explanation." Placards appeared throughout the city stating that two girls of five and 12 years had been missing for a week from Mayfield. From Blackpool, five children had disappeared within the last two days, two from the vicinity of Lady's Well, two from Fair Lane and two others from Evergreen. In most cases, the children were sent on errands by their parents, never to return. The police were investigating, said the newspaper, but had not arrived at an explanation yet. [3] This account, the first of a small number in the *Cork Examiner*, was widely reprinted in other newspapers. Eventually it reached Charles Fort, who spotted it in the *Tiverton Times*. But while this account was widely republished, the follow-ups in the *Cork Examiner* weren't. On 24 August, the newspaper reported that Sub-Inspector Egan had informed the magistrates at the police office that the reports of kidnapped children were without foundation. "Mr Egan explained that only two children have been missed and that one of them has been found drowned." [4]

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

> Children would be lured inside a carriage drawn by four horses and taken to a castle, where they would undergo deadly bloodlettings…

The newspaper, though, pointed to a letter published in the same edition written by one Thomas A Attridge, who had a strange and unsettling story to tell that foreshadows the phantom social workers scares of more than a century later. Wrote Attridge: "Proprietors of schools should be especially on their guard just now, about the safe custody of children placed under their charge. My two children are attending in Marlboro'-street. This day about two o'clock, a man wearing a military cap, called at this school, and said he was sent by me for both children. This was without any possible foundation, and had not their mother been just previously at the school, and warned the Proprietress not to let the children go with any one not known to her, in all probability the little ones would be now amongst those missing." [5]

On 26 August the *Cork Examiner* published a lengthy article detailing its own investigation of the mystery that was now widely known throughout Cork, with "probably no person in the city who has not heard rumours of a more or less alarming character on the subject". It further commented: "Those which we have heard, and the results of our enquiries into them we now state. Our reporters visited every police station in the city and went to every street and lane where children were said to be missing. In several instances they were enabled completely to solve

the problem, but in many others the story had passed through so many 'mediums' that it was impossible to find the author or test its actual truth. Great exaggeration marked nearly every case. The first case reported was that of a tradesman living at Mayfield, having lost two children nearly a month ago. That was found to be true. Five children were said to have disappeared from the neighbourhood of Blackpool, but our enquiries there elicited no foundation for the statement…" The newspaper listed case after case in which the vanishings had themselves vanished into thin air: a little boy said to be missing from Collin's Lane was found a day later; children alleged missing were found safe with their families; reports of a child missing at Evergreen were found baseless; a woman missed a child at Duncan Street but it had returned; a little girl was absent from Clarence Street for a day but had returned unharmed; stories of children missing from Warren's Lane were without truth, and so forth. At the same time, there were rumours and stories in circulation similar to the one from Mr Attridge. Sub Inspector Gunn had received a letter from a man in Patrick Street stating that as his son was returning from school, he was accosted by a woman offering him "sweets and toys to induce him to accompany her", although fortunately the lad had not done so. Another source mentioned a man described as "a swaggering rustic" trying to entice a seven-year-old boy with money to enter a train, but the child was missed in time and brought back. The newspaper admitted that it could not gauge the truth of that statement. Finishing the detailed report of its enquiries, it concluded: "There have been many other rumours in circulation whose extravagance made their falsehood more apparent. We have stated as far as we have been enabled to ascertain, the causes for the panic which has undoubtedly existed in the city. Everybody will see that though not absolutely without foundation, the rumours in circulation are for the most part gross exaggerations, and that the widespread alarm to which they have given rise is not warranted." [6]

But at the very time the *Cork Examiner* discredited the missing children stories as a rumour-based panic after its thorough investigation, other newspapers were lagging behind and were still carrying reprints of the original report. I did not find the conclusive investigation results of the *Examiner* reprinted anywhere else, and this may have been why Fort missed it.

How did this scare in Cork begin? What could have caused it? The month of August featured more reports of children's disappearances in other cities, a fact that Fort also noted. An account in the *Cork Examiner*, published a week or so before the local scare began, might have contributed to its development. This account described the "great excitement" of large segments of the working classes of Brussels about the subject of the kidnapping of children: "Some time ago, it seems, the papers published an account of the arrest of a princess accused of killing children in order to bathe in their blood for the purpose of preserving her beauty." [7]

Indeed, I found a brief mention elsewhere of how in Vienna, in the same timeframe, a woman was arrested who, it was alleged, "often through threats and helped by a woman of ill repute, conducted bloodlettings on little girls, to wash herself with the blood to preserve her beauty." [8]

The people of Brussels were so agitated by these fears that, in a few instances, hastily assembled crowds accosted Englishmen who accidentally spoke to children and thus "incurred the suspicion of being kidnappers". The account of the Brussels child kidnapping panic was also widely published in UK newspapers during August.[9] Turning to Dutch newspapers for the same month, we read about "incomprehensible rumours spread in certain quarters in Brussels" of Englishmen kidnapping children and sending them to London, "where they are killed and their blood is used for the cure of certain persons of distinction"; and about "a Russian lady who steals children for their blood". The Brussels scare resulted in several harrowing incidents: one English sailor was stoned by women calling him a child snatcher; another Englishman barely escaped in a police carriage under a hail of stones thrown at it, which broke the windows of the vehicle. [10]

Brussels was not the only place where an Englishman had to fear for his life. Also in August – and this may have been another amplifying factor for the Cork panic – many UK newspapers published a letter written by a Mr Henry D Jencken. [11] He reported a panic in the Spanish town of Lorca, where he had been attacked and nearly killed by a furious mob believing him to be "one of the suspected 'Tios del Sain,' child-stealers, to whom reports have imputed the horrible crime of catching and butchering young children for the purpose of using the fat of their entrails to repair the telegraph wires.

"On the night in question, he says, I had strolled into the Paseo, or public walk, the ordinary evening promenade of the townspeople, and sauntering down the main road that runs at a right angle to the tree-sheltered walks of the Paseo, was met by a woman leading a child by the hand, whom I greeted with the customary salutation 'Buenes tardes,' which she returned in the usual manner, when suddenly she turned round, and crying 'Antonio,' ran in the direction of some small houses 50 yards distant.

"As I had no idea that the cry of alarm referred to me, I slowly sauntered back to the Paseo, but before I had proceeded 100 yards I noticed three men following me; instantly they closed in upon me, and commenced a most desperate attack upon my person..." [12]

As one newspaper commented: "…it seems that child stealing... prevails to a considerable extent, not only in Spain but in France and Belgium; so that in remote places the appearance of a stranger creates alarm, and he is looked upon with sinister suspicion inconsistent with personal safety." [13]

In 1869, then, something was afoot, even if it wasn't Fort's suggestion of teleportation. The year saw a panic in several European cities because of widely circulating rumours of the kidnappings of children for nefarious ends. Reporting on the scares, a number of newspapers did point out that they were just that: panics, without any basis in reality. The 1869 child-snatching panics were not unique, but rather belong to a tradition of similar scares. As far back as 1750, Paris had experienced a scare involving rumours of shuttered carriages kidnapping children for their blood to cure an ailing prince or king. In the 18th century, in the Belgian city of Antwerp, parents scared their children with tales of the Blood Carriage, a beautiful hearse drawn by four horses and carrying a rich lady; children would be lured inside and taken to a castle, where they would undergo deadly bloodlettings for a king who could only be cured with the blood of children aged less than seven. The French city of Lyon saw rumours that led to riots in 1768. In this version, the children were kidnapped because a young prince needed a new arm; his doctors tried to attach one, but the operation failed every day – or so the story went. [14]

Fort may have missed the larger picture while focusing on his teleportation theory, but unwittingly presented the scraps of a larger scare that gripped various cities throughout Europe that year.

NOTES

1 Charles Fort, *Lo!*, Kendall, 1931, page 208.

2 I counted 28 British, Scottish and Irish newspapers carrying the account between 21 Aug and 2 Sept.

3 'Extraordinary Disappearance Of Children', *Cork Examiner*, 21 Aug 1869.

4 *Cork Examiner*, 24 Aug 1869.

5 'The Alleged Disappearance Of Children', *Cork Examiner*, 24 Aug 1869.

6 'The Suspected Kidnapping', *Cork Examiner*, 26 Aug 1869.

7 *Cork Examiner*, 17 Aug 1869.

8 *Middelburgsche Courant*, Middelburg, The Netherlands, 3 Aug 1869.

9 I found six mentions in UK newspapers, two in US newspapers, and one in a Dutch newspaper, published between 13 and 21 Aug 1869.

10 *Middelburgsche Courant*, 13 Aug 1869.

11 I counted 35 instances between 1 and 28 Aug in the British newspapers.

12 'Murderous Attack Upon An Englishman In Spain. Extraordinary Superstition', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 16 Aug 1869.

13 *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 19 Aug 1869

14 Peter Burger, 'Onvrijwillige Donors, De mythe van Amerikaanse orgaanrovers', *Skepter* 8:3, September, 1995.

GHOSTS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

THE OLD SOUTH WAS FILLED WITH FOLK BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS, BUT IN A SOCIETY FORMED BY THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY, GHOSTS WERE JUST AS OFTEN A MEANS OF REPRESSION AND SOCIAL CONTROL. **JACOB MIDDLETON** EXPLORES A FORGOTTEN WORLD OF HAUNTED PLANTATIONS AND NIGHT RIDERS... ILLUSTRATION BY KIM THOMPSON.

Henry Garry was just a child when the ghosts visited his family's cabin in Alabama. He was in the yard one evening after supper when he saw a horseback procession of spectral figures approaching from down the road. The incident occurred in the early 1870s, though when interviewed over 60 years later, Garry recalled clearly the events that followed. The group, 100 strong and robed in white, drew up at the cabin, and a figure at the head of the column summoned Garry's father and demanded a bucket of water from the cabin's well. Though scared, Garry's father complied with the request. The white-clad figure then took the bucket, raised it to his mouth, and drained it dry. He did the same with two further buckets of water. After draining the third, he addressed Garry's family. "Lordy, that sure was good," said the ghostly figure. "It was the first drink of water I'se had since I was killed at the battle of Shiloh."[1]

Despite their phantom-like appearance and sinister claims, the figures that visited the Garry cabin were not ghosts in any supernatural sense, but night riders: vigilantes who patrolled rural areas of the American South after nightfall and brutally suppressed any challenges to the established order. Garry's family were black – former slaves who had been freed at the close of the American Civil War, less than 10 years earlier. The appearance of the night riders at their cabin was a clear threat, a warning that they should maintain their subservient position or meet with violent reprisal. The morning after the night riders visited the Garry cabin, the body of a white man named Billings was found hanging from an oak tree nearby. He was a northerner who had come to Alabama after the war and had been encouraging former slaves in the state to assert their rights.

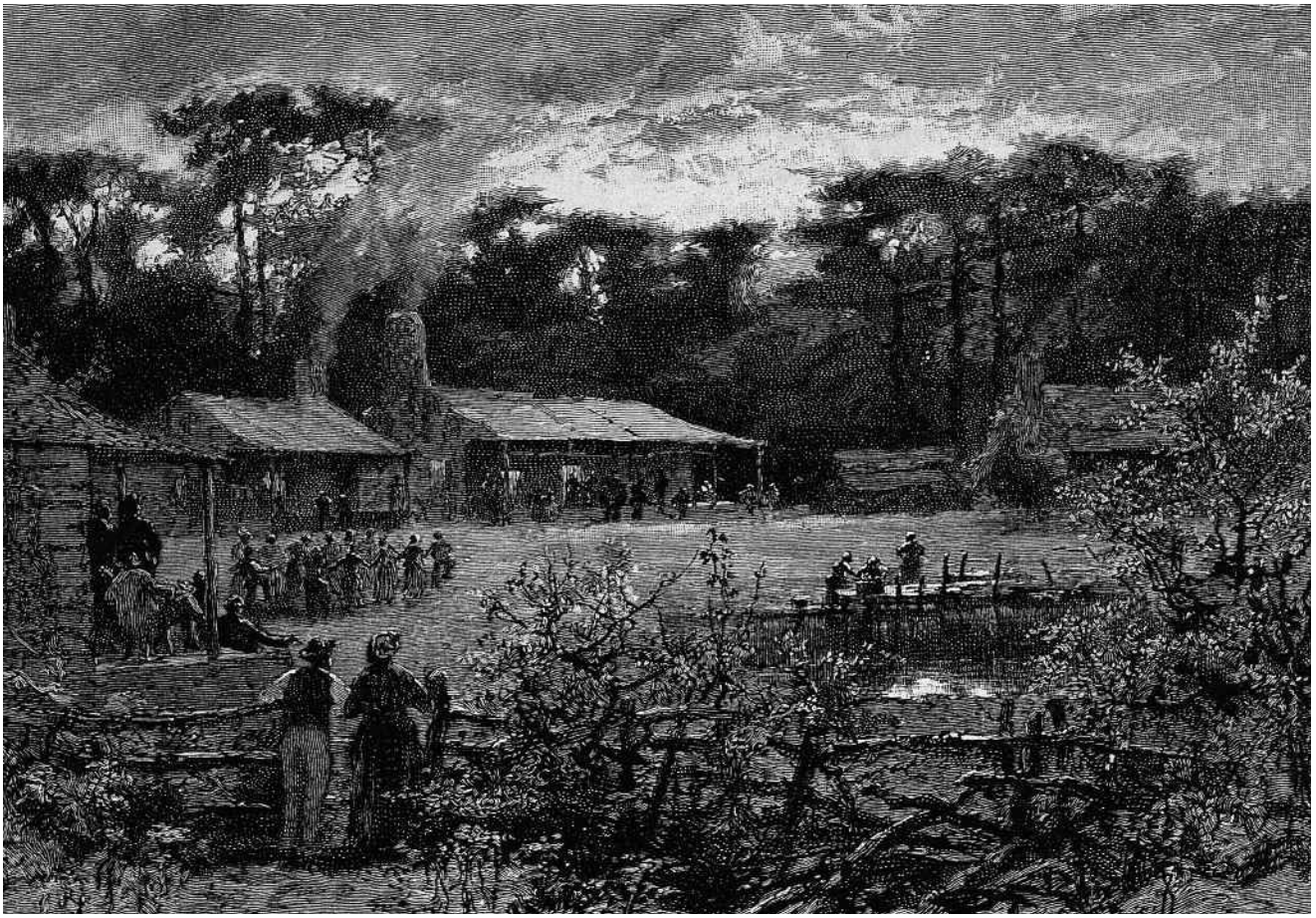
> SLAVE OWNERS EMPLOYED FEAR TO ENCOURAGE AN OBEDIANT WORKFORCE

The manner in which the night riders clothed themselves in supernatural trappings was part of a long history of the use of superstition to control the black residents of the American South. This had begun in the era of slavery, when overseers and slave owners had used the fear of the supernatural as a means of encouraging a compliant and obedient workforce; it continued after the emancipation of slaves at the end of the Civil War, as night riders adopted ghostly imagery in order to frighten the free black population. In the American South, ghosts were not merely figures of folk tales and popular beliefs, but were employed as a tool of repression.

SLAVERY AND THE HOURS OF DARKNESS

For much of the 18th and 19th centuries, the institution of slavery was the dominant

LEFT: Three Ku Klux members arrested in Tishomingo County, Mississippi, September 1871, for the attempted murder of an entire family.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A 19th century engraving showing the slaves' quarters on a large plantation in the South. As evening fell, slaves would enjoy some hours of relative freedom – a prospect that worried their white owners and led to the formation of patrols to monitor the black population's night-time activities.

force in the economic and cultural life of the American South. The agricultural wealth of states such as South Carolina and Georgia was based upon the exploitation of slaves, with crops such as tobacco and cotton dependent upon forced labour. Whilst slavery had once been common throughout the United States, most of the states north of the Ohio and Potomac rivers had abolished the institution in the decades following the American Revolution. Over the same period, the southern states had institutionalised slavery, and had transformed slave labour, and the racist notion of white superiority, into the foundation of southern society.

Yet, the institution of slavery was always a precarious edifice, maintained by force. Compelling an unwilling workforce to provide labour required slave owners to be constantly vigilant, and the behaviour of slaves was carefully policed. It was not uncommon for the work of slaves to be observed from the first light of morning to the close of day. At sunset, both overseers and slaves would retreat to their homes, to rest and recover for the following day's labour. However, as many contemporary observers noted, the hours of darkness were a time of freedom for slaves, as was observed by the American journalist and anti-slavery campaigner Richard Hildreth. He noted that whilst slaves might appear lazy and docile during daylight hours, this was a demeanour which they adopted in response to the demand of forced servitude. [2] Once the day had drawn to a close, and they were no longer subject to the scrutiny of overseers, the slaves' behaviour was transformed. Hildreth observed how slaves who had been passive and seemingly indolent whilst working for their white masters became intelligent, industrious, and sociable at night. [3] The hours of darkness provided a respite from the regimented drudgery of daylight, and many slaves took this as an opportunity to pursue their preferred forms of work and leisure, roaming the woods and swamps, or visiting distant plantations. "Though you have them slaves all the day," noted one observer, "they are not so in the night." [4]

WHEN THE DAY DREW TO A CLOSE, SLAVES WERE NO LONGER SUBJECT TO SCRUTINY

It was common knowledge that slaves were active during the hours of darkness, and while some slave owners tolerated this, many southern states put in place patrol systems to police the night-time activities of slaves. From colonial days onwards, the white population of America had been warned of the "great Disorders committed by Negroes, who are permitted by their imprudent Masters, &c. to be out late at Night". [5] White citizens complained of the petty crime attributed to slaves, and it was not uncommon for slave owners to find their stores of food pilfered from by their hungry workers. More threatening still was the fear of insurgency. New York, for instance, had been struck by a slave revolt in 1712 that had been organised and executed in the hours of darkness. The revolt started one spring night, at "the going down of the Moon", when the slaves set fire to a house, and attacked those who came to douse the flames. [6] Whilst the revolt was quickly put down, it was followed by many similar rebellions, often planned and executed after dark. As a result, it was common for slave-owners to see the night as dangerous, a time in which their slaves would use the opportunities presented by darkness to rise up against their oppressors.

THE HAUNTED PLANTATION

In order to prevent rebellion and keep the black population of the South under control, slave owners in the southern states sought to instil fear in their workers. As Richard Hildreth observed in the 1840s, the "relation of master and slave... is a relation purely of force and terror," and "Its only sanction is the power of the master; its best security, the fears of the slave." [7] Fear was an essential component in the mechanisms of control,

since the white population was outnumbered in many parts of the rural south, and night-time policing of slaves limited and ineffectual. By encouraging their slaves to be fearful, slave owners sought to ward off violence and rebellion.

One of the fears actively encouraged among the black population was a fear of the supernatural. Evidence of this was gathered by the folklorist Gladys-Marie Fry during the 1960s and 1970s in her research into black folk history. Fry found that the folk tales preserved by the children and grandchildren of slaves suggested that the overseers on plantations encouraged the superstitions of their charges, and inculcated within them the belief that the hours of darkness were haunted by threatening supernatural entities. [8] Fry's work was confirmed by the recollections of a number of former slaves; for instance, the Reverend HH Edmunds, who had been a slave in Mississippi and Tennessee, said that "the superstitions of coloured people and the belief in ghosts and goblins [was] due to the fact that their emotions were worked upon by slave drivers to keep them in subjugation". [9] Edmunds went on to state that "white people dressed as ghosts, frightened the coloured people into doing many things under protest" and that "the 'ghosts' were feared far more than the slave-drivers". [10] As another former slave simply noted: "Marse used to try to scare us by telling us dar was spooks." [11]

The effectiveness of such ghost stories was reliant on the fact that most southern states banned the education of slaves. Often illiterate, the world outlook of many slaves was shaped by folk beliefs and the Church. This offered grist to the mill of racism, with white writers claiming it as a sign that black Americans were intellectually inferior and prone to irrational beliefs. One defender of slavery, for instance, argued in the 1850s that the black population was "not yet more than semi-civilised," and that their religious feelings were mingled with the "marvellous and unearthly, ghosts, witches, and charmings." [12] "Negroes are very credulous," argued another writer of the period, "and prone to superstition and fanaticism." [13] Such interpretations reflected the prejudices of the time and neglected the fact that the beliefs of slaves were heavily influenced by their conditions within the institution of slavery.

While ghost stories were employed as a general means of frightening slaves, they might also be employed in a more specific manner. For instance, by labelling particular locations as haunted, slave owners might be able to persuade their workers from straying far from the plantation. The feeling of being hemmed in by the supernatural was explained by one black resident of the South, who stated that: "Nearly anyway you turn, you lived in the country, you try to go home or go away from home at night, you had to go by a spooky place. It's either an old house that someone has seen ghosties there, and the reason why the ghosties be hanging round, or either it was a cemetery where some wicked person been buried, and you will see a spook around his grave". [14]

Such tales were particularly effective in the plantation landscape of the American South, in which farmland was interspersed with magnolia groves and rose thickets; land unsuitable for cultivation was left as either wild pine ridges, or swampy river valleys. [15] That land in the South was cheaper than slaves meant that in some regions it was not uncommon to find plantations "abandoned, and given up to decay", when their owners had decided it was more profitable to move on than continue to farm a particular spot. [16] The result was a landscape in which plantation land was mixed with desolate wilderness.

The former slave Charles Ball testified to the manner in which superstition and events in local history were woven together to form the folklore of a particular area. Ball recalled that while he was a slave in South Carolina a white woman was apparently kidnapped and murdered by two black men. Soon after the events, noted Ball, "the forest that had been the scene of these bloody deeds was reported and believed to be visited at night by beings of unearthly make, whose groans and death-struggles were heard in the darkest recesses of the woods, amidst the flapping of the wings of vultures, the fluttering of carrion crows, and the dismal croaking of ravens". [17] Ball went on to note that the "murdered lady was also seen walking by moonlight, near the spot where she had been dragged from her horse, wrapped in a blood-stained mantle; overhung with gory and dishevelled locks." [18] The result of these tales meant that the highway passing was ill-frequented in the hours of darkness: "While I remained in this neighbourhood no coloured person ever travelled this road, alone, after night-fall; and many white men would have ridden 10 miles round the country to avoid the passage of the ridge road after dark. Generations must pass away before the

ABOVE LEFT: "Visit of the Ku-Klux", an engraving by Frank Bellew for *Harper's Weekly*, 1872.

The Superstitions of Slaves

A new deal oral history project has left us an invaluable record of the beliefs of former slaves

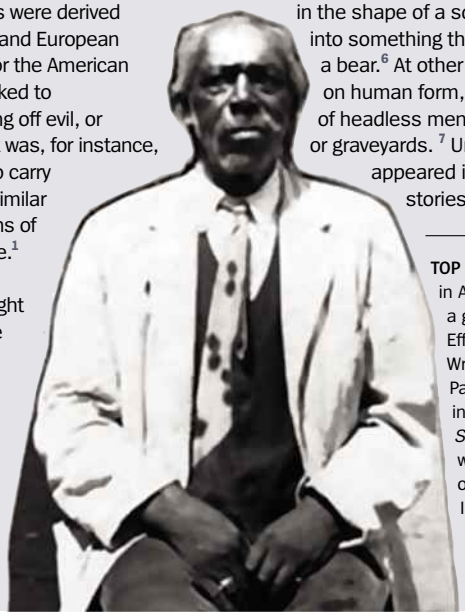
PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

One of the most significant repositories of slave experience was compiled during the latter part of the 1930s by the Federal Writers Project ('FWP'). A response to the Great Depression, the FWP was part of President Roosevelt's New Deal programme and was designed to employ writers and historians on large-scale research projects of national importance. Amongst the work produced by the FWP was *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States*, a wide-ranging oral history project in which former slaves were interviewed and their experiences recorded.

Many interviewees offered insights into the beliefs and superstitions common to the slave community in antebellum America: they recounted ghost stories, talked of magic and omens and explained how charms and rituals were used to ward off misfortune. Their tales revealed how superstition pervaded the world of the slave. It was normal for slaves to believe that any unusual event might be a portent, or that the night-time world was the domain of wandering spirits.

Slave superstitions were derived from a mix of African and European traditions, adapted for the American South. Many were linked to techniques for warding off evil, or securing good luck; it was, for instance, common for slaves to carry rabbit feet, or other similar talismans, as a means of preventing misfortune.[1] While charms made from animal parts might ward off bad luck, the behaviour of animals could be seen as a sign of events to come. It was, for instance, a common belief that the call of a screech owl or whippoorwill outside a house was an omen of an imminent death. [2] Almost any unusual form of animal behaviour could be read as a portent, with one former slave recalling that: "Prior to the Civil War, there were hordes of ants and everyone said this was an omen of war, and there was a war." [3]

The prevalence of such omens was rooted in a belief that the natural world was strange and magical. Animals, for instance, were seen as intelligent, adopting human speech on Christmas morning. [4] At other times, they might communicate in their own language, though often away from the prying eyes of humans; one former slave told the story of how he stumbled across a convocation of black cats, meeting on a grave in the middle of the night.[5] There was, moreover, no clear dividing line between the world of animals and that of spirits, and any animal behaving strangely, particularly at night, might be interpreted as a ghost. Spirits often manifested as cats or dogs, though such apparitions might change their forms before observers; one former slave told of cats that transformed into cattle, and another of how he had witnessed a creature scurry up a tree in the shape of a squirrel, before growing into something the size and shape of a bear.[6] At other times, ghosts took on human form, and tales abounded of headless men haunting highways or graveyards. [7] Unlike the spirits which appeared in popular ghost stories, these apparitions were generally considered by the southern population to be strange and unknowable, a feature of the night-time landscape that the unfortunate might encounter when travelling after sunset.



TOP LEFT: This haunted house in Arkansas was described in a ghost story told by Miss Effie Cowan to the Federal Writers Project. **TOP RIGHT:** Patsy Moses, one of the interviewees from the FWP's *Slave Narratives* oral history who shared her memories of slave superstitions. **LEFT:** Interviewee Marshall Butler was another former slave who recalled folk beliefs of the period.

At the time when the FWP was compiling its folk history, the last remaining slaves were well into old age. The youngest interviewees were in their 70s, and many who participated in the project were in their 80s or 90s. Slavery was, by that point, a distant memory, and some participants in the project saw the folk beliefs of slaves as a relic of a more primitive time. "People are a lot smarter now than they was then," one former slave noted.[8] Yet, even in the 20th century, many former slaves retained the beliefs of their youth. In 1937, FWP worker Margaret Johnson spoke to a former slave named Nancy Settles. Settles said that she had never seen a ghost, but had heard the drummer at Rock Creek, Georgia. When pressed further, she said that if you went down to the creek "you hear Brrr, Brrr, Bum hum, louder and louder and den it goes away," and that while she had never seen the drummer, she had "heayd de drum, 'fo de war, and ater dat too… Some say he is a little man whut wears a cap and goes down the crick beating a drum befo' a war. He wuz a Revolushun drummer, and cum back to beat the drum befo' de [civil] war. But some say you can hear de drum 'most any spring now." [9]

Such beliefs should remind us of the role of superstition as a comfort in difficult times. Slavery might have been long past, but the Great Depression and the uncertain future of a world marching towards war meant that, even in the 1930s, the strange and ghostly commanded as much power as it had 100 years before.

NOTES

1 Interviews with Patsy Moses, Harre Quarls, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States*, vol XVI (Texas part 3).

2 Interviews with Hamp Kennedy, *Slave Narratives*, vol IX (Mississippi), Mary Williams, volume II (Arkansas part 7), Marshall Butler, vol IV (Georgia part 1), Wheeler Gresham, vol IV (Georgia part 2), Benjamin Russell, vol XIV (South Carolina part 4).

3 Interview with Harriet Gresham, *Slave Narratives*, vol III (Florida).

4 Interview of Amanda McCray, *Slave Narratives*, vol III (Florida). This was a fairly common European tradition which appears to have crossed the Atlantic.

5 Interview with Doc Quinn, *Slave Narratives*, vol II (Arkansas part 6).

6 Interviews with James Davis, *Slave Narratives*, vol II (Arkansas part 2), Jordon Smith, vol XVI (Texas part 4), Octavia George, vol XIII (Oklahoma), Sallie Sims, vol II (Arkansas part 7).

7 Interviews with Octavia George, *Slave Narratives*, vol XIII (Oklahoma), Morris Hillyer, vol XIII (Oklahoma), William McWhorter, vol IV (Georgia part 3), John Barker, vol XVI (Texas part 1), Jordon Smith, vol XVI (Texas part 4).

8 Interview with John Estell, *Slave Narratives*, vol X (Missouri).

9 Interview with Nancy Settles, *Slave Narratives*, volimpersonatp IV (Georgia part 3).

tradition of this place will be forgotten; and many a year will open and close, before the last face will be pale, or the last heart beat, as the twilight traveller skirts the borders of the murderers' Swamp." [19]

THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE

While slavery was abolished at the end of the Civil War, the use of superstition and supernatural imagery as a means of controlling the black population remained a fixture in the American South for the rest of the century. One manifestation of this was the ghostly costumes employed by night riders, groups of vigilantes that patrolled the highways in the hours of darkness, meting out their own brand of justice. The night riders dressed as ghosts both to invoke past superstitions, and to conceal their identities from those they terrorised. Most infamous of all the night riders were the the Ku Kluxes who, through the 1860s and 1870s, persecuted the newly-free black population, as well as any white citizens who were seen as aiding them. [20]

When out on patrol, members of Ku Klux groups would dress in masks and long robes; this played into part of their conceit of being "the ghosts of the Confederate dead [who] were coming back to punish those who had been disloyal to the Confederate service". [21] It was common for Ku Klux bands to approach lonely farmsteads and to claim that they were the ghosts of soldiers who had not touched a drop of water since their death at the battle of Shiloh. [22] Their apparent ghostliness was emphasised by sinister disguises, which included masks, hoods, and other apparel designed to stress their apparently spectral nature. [23] One former slave described how: "Some had on skin coverings, cow heads and horns. Some wore white sheets and black dresses on white horses. They was scary looking. They would whoop and kill too. I was too scared to get caught off at night." [24]

For a period of 10 years the so-called 'invisible empire' of the Ku Klux movement terrorised former slaves and their white sympathisers in the American South. While black Americans may have recognised that these night riders were nothing more than men in disguise, this did little to lessen the terror that they inspired. Ku Klux members acted with impunity throughout much of the region, and those black citizens who offended them were often murdered. One former slave recalled how the Ku Klux would take black members of the local community "to Turk Creek bridge and make dem set up on de bannisters of de bridge; den dey would shoot 'em offen de bannisters into de water. I 'clare dem was de awfulest days I ever is seed." [25]

The terrifying levels of violence inflicted by the Ku Klux gangs more than justified the fear that they inspired within black communities in the American South. Yet, the terror inspired by their deeds encouraged a certain degree of ambiguity in how they were seen and interpreted by the black population. This is, perhaps, best encapsulated by the comments of one former slave, Sam McAllum, when he was interviewed in old age during the 1930s. McAllum viewed the Ku Klux riders that haunted his youth as supernatural entities, and referred to them as evil spirits. Yet this led him to wonder why they no longer roamed the highways of the American South. "I don't know why dey don't have no Kloo Kluxes now," he said. "De sperrit still have de same power." [26] The confusion arose since, for individuals such as McAlllum, there was little distinction to be made between the evil activities of men and the fearsome apparitions believed to wander the night. Both were equally representative of the undefined terrors that might meet the black citizens of the American South when they wandered out, alone, into the night. FT

GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Supernatural imagery appropriated by the Ku Klux Klan, in a still from DW Griffiths's *Birth of a Nation*.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JACOB MIDDLETON is a writer and historian, with interests in Victorian popular culture. He is the author of *Spirits of an Industrial Age*, an exploration of ghost impersonation and ghost traditions in the 19th century.

NOTES

1 Interview with Henry Garry, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States*, Vol I (Alabama). The spelling in the quote has been corrected from the version in the original transcript.

2 Richard Hildreth: *Despotism in America*, (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1840), p52.

3 Ibid, p53.

4 Richard Parkinson, *The Experienced Farmer's Tour in America* (London: John Stockdale, 1805), p420.

5 *Boston Evening Post*, 14 July 1740, quoted in David A Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), p86.

6 Joshua Coffin: An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860), p10.

7 Hildreth, *Despotism in America*, p38.

8 Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), pp63-65.

9 Interview with Rev HH Edmunds, *Slave Narratives*, vol V (Indiana).

10 Ibid.

11 Interview with Fred James, *Slave Narratives*, vol XIV (South Carolina part 3).

12 Thomas Read Rootes Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery*, vol 1 (Philadelphia: T & JW Johnson & Co., 1858), ccxx.

13 William H Holcomb, "Characteristics and Capabilities of the Negro Race", *Southern Literary Messenger*, vol 33 (Dec 1861), p405.

14 Interview with former slave Matthew Hurley, quoted in Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History*, p66.

15 Frederick Law Olmstead, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1863), pp13-14,18.

16 Ibid, pp19-20.

17 Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* (New York: John S Taylor, 1837), pp260-261.

18 Ibid, p261.

19 Ibid, pp261-262.

20 While modern terminology refers to a 'Ku Klux Klan', in black oral history they are universally referred to as the Ku Klux, which appears to have been the usage within southern communities during the 1860s and 1870s. As one former slave noted, "The word 'Klan' was never included in their name." See interview with Samuel S Taylor, *Slave Narratives*, vol II (Arkansas part 1).

21 *American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events*, 1871 (New York: D Appleton and Company, 1872), p172.

22 See, for instance, Interview with Ann Ulrich Evans, *Slave Narratives*, vol X (Missouri).

23 See, for instance, interview with Wylie Miller, *Slave Narratives*, vol X (Missouri).

24 Interview with Charles Rigger, *Slave Narratives*, vol VII (Arkansas part 6).

25 Interview with Brawley Gilmore, *Slave Narratives*, vol XIV (South Carolina part 2).

26 Interview with Sam McAllum, *Slave Narratives*, vol IX (Mississippi).

I SING THE MIND ELECTRIC

MARINUS ANTHONY VAN DER SLUIJS explores esoteric and electromagnetic explanations for near-death experiences

In a recent book, the Dutch thanatologist Maureen Venselaar (pictured below) has carried the fledgling study of near-death experiences (NDEs) forward in a number of promising ways. She claims to have identified 10 new characteristic traits of near-death experiences, including the sensation of travelling 'faster than light', the sense of being attracted by a type of 'magnet', the observation of a vortex or 'hourglass', and the observation of the Earth or astronomical bodies from an extraterrestrial perspective. She argues that photons released by cells under distress, such as impending death, are the physical carriers of the mind or 'consciousness' that appears to vacate the body. And she proposes that trademark elements of the near-death experience, such as the journey through a tunnel, find a natural explanation in astronomical entities such as black holes and wormholes.

Some of these thought-provoking ideas converge with conclusions I had privately reached in the course of the past few years, but have so far only partly been able to publish. The 'psychonaut' theme, in which the disembodied consciousness of the near-death experiencer finds itself rising above the Earth's atmosphere and even into space, is a subject I have explored from the vantage-point of classical sources in an unpublished article entitled 'Cosmology in Ancient Near-Death Experiences'. In addition, Venselaar's recognition of light – in the form of photons – as the vehicle of the disembodied mind dovetails with my suspicion that consciousness, both inside and outside the body, is to be correlated with the electromagnetic spectrum, of which visible light is a part. One line of evidence for this statement is that the nervous system, including the brain, functions by means of electromagnetism anyway. Another, that electricity and magnetism seem to be the common denominator, often overlooked, in a surprisingly long list of 'paranormal' and fortean phenomena.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN 'NATURAL' AND 'SUPERNATURAL' DO NOT HELP

Perhaps the weakest element in Venselaar's otherwise commendable research is her unfailing belief in the physical reality of black holes, multiple universes, wormholes, dark matter and similar staples of Big Bang cosmology, relativity theory and quantum physics. Such exotic concepts have long enthralled writers at the academic fringe. Venselaar's compatriot Pim van Lommel, a cardiologist who has conducted an invaluable study of near-death experiences among people successfully resuscitated from heart attacks, similarly resorted to quantum theory in his attempt to make sense of the phenomenon.

Some view the belief that purely mathematical notions such as the above populate the real Universe as an intellectual dead end. Instead, one might wish to pursue the hypothesis of an electromagnetic 'soul' in the light of actual, observed knowledge concerning the Earth's rich electromagnetic space environment, as explored by plasma physicists. The following is a playful thought experiment along the latter lines.

FIVE PRELIMINARIES

This approach is best prefaced with a few disclaimers – no less than five.

Firstly, for the present purpose the terms 'soul', 'mind' and 'consciousness' are used indiscriminately to refer to that portion of a biological organism which is self-aware and contains its thoughts, including memories and will.

Secondly, it operates on the understanding, now promoted by several specialists, that the mind may exist external to the body. On this view, the brain or the nervous system facilitates, but does not generate consciousness. Presumably, it blocks a range of signals as much as it enables another.

Thirdly, the worn distinctions between 'natural' and 'supernatural' or between 'material' and 'spiritual' do not help. They preclude an open investigation insofar as the conclusions that the mind is not natural and not material are already embedded in them. By contrast, the default assumption that all experienced and known reality is natural and physical proves to be quite adequate – as long as it is remembered that physics involves matter as well as forces and fields.

Fourthly, if evolutionary theory is to be taken seriously at all, any explanation of consciousness must consider how it applies across the realm of living beings. Too often, discussions of near-death experiences focus on human beings as if these are the only species to possess a degree of consciousness. But just as the solid, liquid and gaseous components of human bodies share their developmental history with other mammals, so a possible spiritual component is likely to possess phylogenetic roots.

And finally, traditional terms such as 'hereafter', 'afterlife' and 'netherworld'

carry temporal and geographic implications which are not necessarily adequate, but may be mythological in origin. For all one knows, the spiritual world may simply exist 'here' and 'now'.

AN ELECTROMAGNETIC EXPLANATION FOR NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

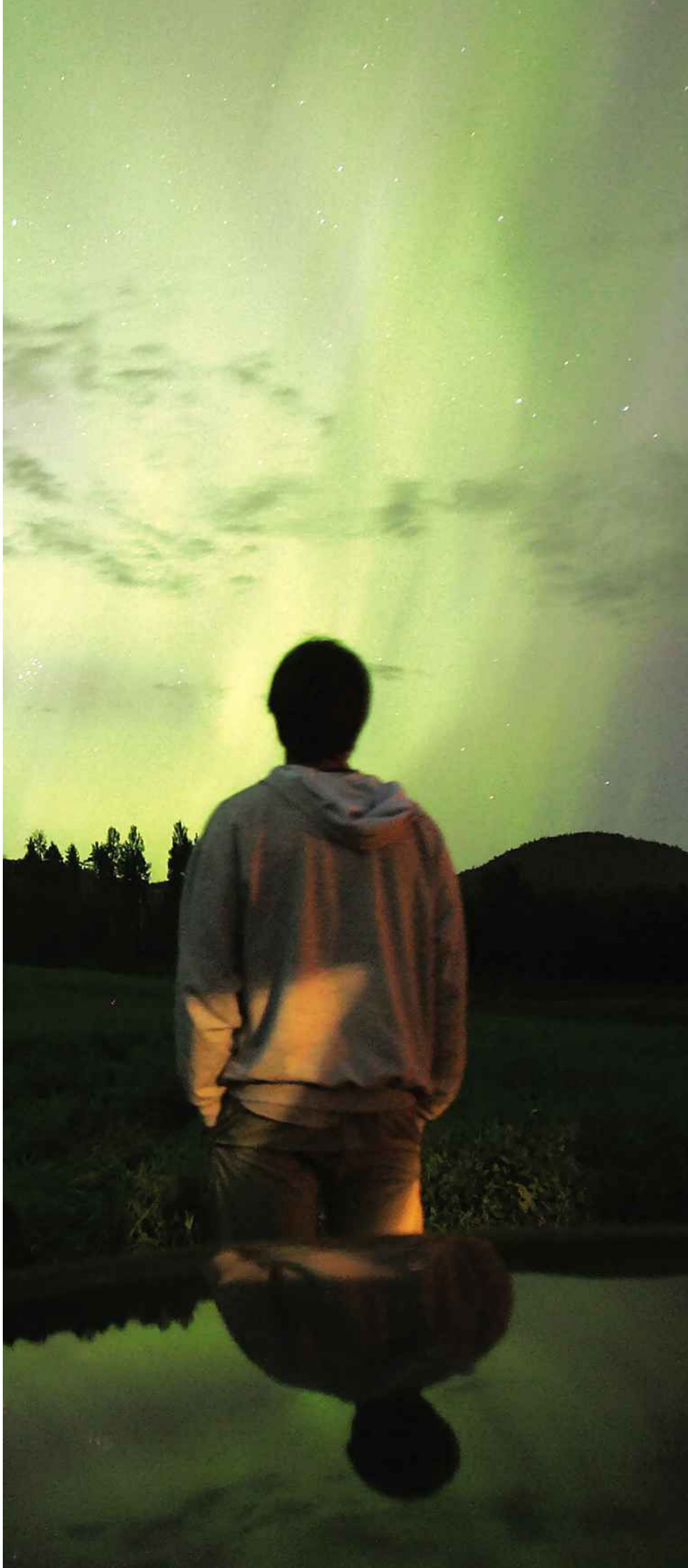
Supposing that the disincarnate 'soul' is indeed electromagnetic in nature, perhaps existing on the wavelengths of visible light, it would be reasonable to infer that it interacts with the ambient electromagnetic circuitry. While the Earth's crust conducts telluric currents and sustains a complex magnetic field, the upper atmosphere conducts currents and their attendant magnetic fields which ultimately join the Earth to the Sun. The dominant constituents of this intricate network reside in the ionosphere, roughly 100-150km (60-90 miles) above the surface. These are the equatorial electrojet, which encircles the Earth close to the magnetic equator, and the two auroral electrojets, which guide charged particles through the oval-shaped regions where the auroræ – the northern and southern lights – are formed. Each auroral oval forms the base of a polar cusp, which is ringed by a system of vertical currents called 'field-aligned currents' or 'Birkeland currents', along which charged particles travel between the ionosphere and – via the magnetosphere – the solar wind. Higher up in the magnetosphere, the Birkeland currents give way to a pair of giant plasma vortices, which deliver charges in bursts through portals which rapidly open and close – so-called Flux Transfer Events.

If it may be assumed that the consciousness vacating the body upon an out-of-body experience or a near-death experience is contained in an electromagnetic field, charged particles or photons, perplexing though that may seem to be, several tell-tale features of the near-death experience appear to fall into place.

The celerity with which the entity feels it is travelling may relate to the speed with which these particles move. Further out, on the interface between the Earth's magnetosphere and the solar wind, incoming charged particles often attain relativistic speeds – speeds approximating the speed of light. Reports from near-death experiencers are adequately explained with the notion of 'an extremely high' or perhaps even a relativistic speed; to conclude that the speed is equal to that of light, let alone infinite, seems premature and unwarranted.

The sense of being strongly drawn to something like a magnet is, of course, seamlessly explained if that is exactly what happens. Charged particles do not roam freely, but their movement is primarily dictated by the laws of electromagnetism. The particles contained in Birkeland currents have no choice but to proceed along the lines of the magnetic field.

The 'being of light', so often encountered in near-death experiences, may well be an expression of one's higher self, 'guardian angel' or 'dæmon', as Kenneth Ring and



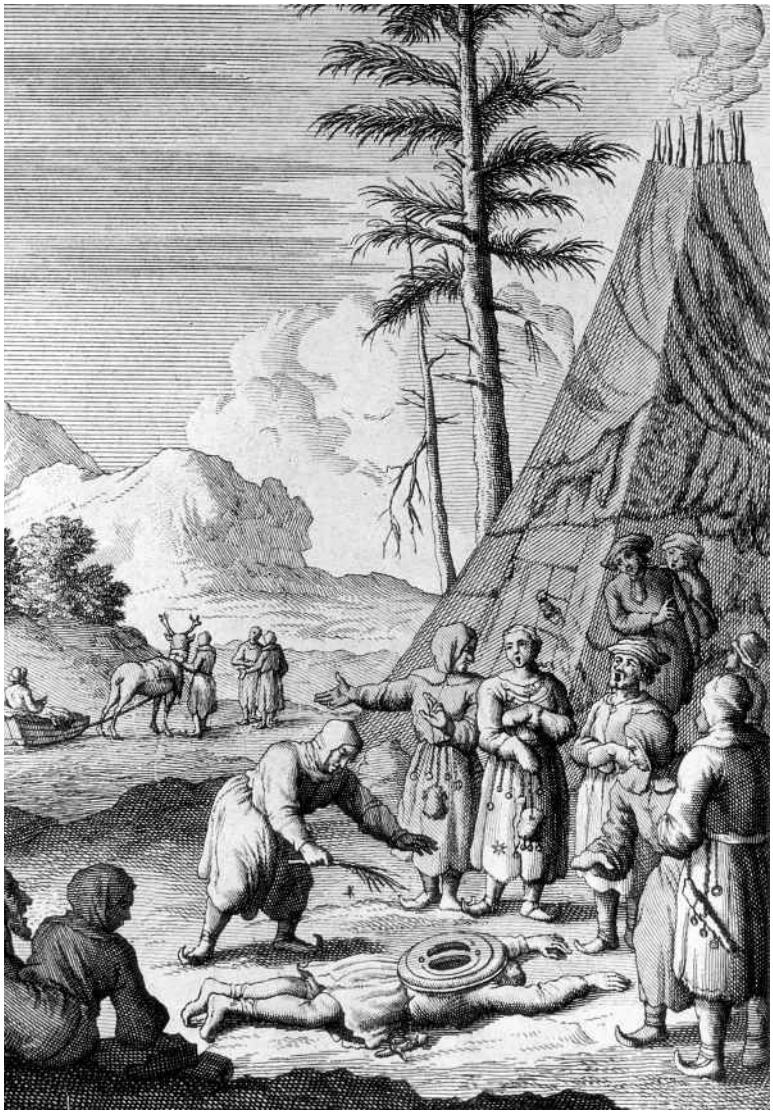
SVEN NACKSTRAND / GETTY IMAGES

Anthony Peake have argued. If so, perhaps this is really an electromagnetic field associated with the organism as a whole, which may even form the latter's blueprint. The 'lower self' gains awareness of this associated field as soon as malfunctioning or suppression of the nervous system allows it to detach itself from the body.

And the 'life review' (see **FT159:34-40**), which is often presented to the experiencer by the 'being of light', might be a process analogous to the downloading of computer files from one disk onto another. Perhaps collapse of the nervous system enables the transfer of information stored in the consciousness of the organism to a wider electromagnetic network, which connects the organism first to its immediate terrestrial environment, but ultimately to the entire Solar System, if not further. As this information is copied, the system's self-awareness causes it to be a necessary witness of the process. If the transfer amounts to an exchange of charge between the environment and the native field of the organism, the concept of an electric discharge may be an apposite description of what is going on. When both sides have reached a state of electrical equilibrium, the 'soul' may experience a sense of oneness with the Universe.

Bits of 'consciousness' floating along local and then geomagnetic field lines may be inclined to follow the trajectory of the auroral current system, travelling towards one of the Earth's magnetic poles. Ions and electrons actually spiral around their guiding magnetic field lines. Moreover, Birkeland currents or magnetic 'flux tubes' exhibit a well-known propensity for vorticity; they often take the form of a single or a double helix, juxtaposed or intertwined. Surely conveyance along such currents would give particle-sized participants an experience strikingly similar to reports of near-death experiences – a 'free fall' up or down a whirling, tornado-like tunnel.

Eventually, the near-death experiencer arrives at a place of magical beauty, typified by mellifluous sounds, congregations of other souls, a palette of indescribable colours and remarkable, often vertiginous structures. If any known natural phenomenon would qualify to account for such descriptions, it might be the polar aurora, produced by the interaction of local atmospheric nitrogen and oxygen with incoming electrons and ions, at the intersection of streams of particles flowing incessantly between the lower atmosphere and the Sun, in both directions. Amazement at the diverse tapestry of colours is typical even among living observers of the aurora; a disembodied mind receptive of light on many other wavelengths might be astounded upon its perception of the aurora, for auroral emissions also occur at ultraviolet, infrared and other wavelengths. Enunciations of a dazzling geometry of dynamic shapes are common to both near-death experiences and eye-witness accounts of auroræ. And, bizarre as it admittedly sounds, there appears to be an uncanny logic to the impression that the auroral lights contain myriad units of incorporeal consciousness exchanging information.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: A Sami Shamanistic ceremony in Lapland: Northern traditional societies believed the polar lights were the souls of the dead. **BELOW:** Yggdrasil, or the World Ash, a Norse representation of the Axis Mundi, linking all the realms of the heavens and the Earth.

THE CURRENTS OFTEN TAKE THE FORM OF A SINGLE OR DOUBLE HELIX

TRADITIONS OF THE SOUL AND THE POLAR AURORA

Traditional societies generally display a marked interest in the posthumous vagaries and itineraries of souls. For one thing, the idea that the aurora consists of 'live souls' concurs with the near-unanimous opinion of traditional cultures at higher latitudes that the polar lights are the 'souls of the dead', engrossed in games, battles or other pastimes. Whereas animistic religions regarded almost any rock or plant as a spiritual being, few – if any – natural phenomena were so ubiquitously and emphatically identified with the abode of posthumous souls as the *aurora borealis* and *australis*.

Furthermore, shamans and other visionaries worldwide often claim to have witnessed 'ropes', 'pillars', 'trees' or other devices enabling them to access the spirit world. The properties attributed to such columns are practically indistinguishable from the *axis mundi* of traditional cosmologies, which is in some cases explicitly located at one of the poles and is frequently linked with the notion of migrating souls. Elsewhere, I have argued that the multifaceted mythology of the *axis mundi* finds its ultimate roots in observations of intense auroral light. Do the spiritual experiences of such 'sky columns' testify to an actual connection with the polar aurora?

Remarkably, this may be exactly what Socrates meant to convey in the famous 'vision of Er', towards the end of Plato's *Republic*. According to this text, Er was "a

ANDI GENTSCH

ABOVE: "A palette of indescribable colours and remarkable, often vertiginous structures": the Aurora Borealis, traditionally identified as the abode of posthumous souls.

warrior bold" who was left for dead on the battlefield, but unexpectedly returned to life at the instant he was placed on the funeral pyre, an unbelievable 12 days later. The spiritual experience he related bears the hallmarks of a genuine near-death experience. At the same time, the detailed description of Er's spiritual itinerary incorporates Plato's cosmology. Er reflected that he travelled amid a bevy of souls, towards "a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the Earth", through which the souls of disembodied people travelled upwards and downwards in space in accordance with the judgment passed on their lives in that place. After an interval of "seven days", "they were required to rise up on the eighth and journey on, and they came in four days to a spot whence they discerned, extended from above throughout the Heaven and the Earth, a straight light like a pillar, most nearly resembling the rainbow, but brighter and purer." A detailed description of this radiant pillar bears out that it served as the pivot of the cosmos, on which the complex movement of the stars and planets as well as the individual fates of living beings depended. On the one hand, it is evident that Socrates, via the mouth of Plato, was describing the Earth's rotational axis. On the other, the luminous pillar recurs in countless near-death and other spiritual experiences and may be equivalent to the proverbial 'tunnel'. One may be forgiven for casually speculating that Er's consciousness actually journeyed to the magnetic north pole, along magnetic field lines, where it witnessed a bundle of Birkeland currents in the form of a colossal radiant pillar. The 'two pathways' of up- and downward-flowing traffic, which feature widely in other near-death experiences as well as in the mythology of death, read like the opposing flows of in- and outbound particles along the polar cusps.

Plutarch in *The Divine Vengeance* (563F-564A) reported as follows on a near-death experience *avant la lettre* attributed to a Thespesius of Soli, Cilicia, who had soared up into the air: "Passing over most of the spectacle, he said that as the souls of those who die came up from below they made a flamelike bubble as the air was displaced, and then, as the bubble gently burst, came forth, human in form, but slight in bulk, and moving with dissimilar motions. Some leapt forth with amazing lightness and darted about aloft in a straight line, while others, like spindles, revolved upon themselves and at the same time swung now downward, now upward, moving in a complex and disordered spiral that barely grew steady after a very long time." If anything, this curious scene is reminiscent of the manifold perturbations seen in the auroral curtains. To cite but one of many examples, an observer at New Haven, Connecticut, described an auroral corona seen on 25 January 1837 as follows: "Innumerable spindles, of silvery lustre, darted from the crimson folds of light that hung around the sky, and all pointed towards the common focus …"

TANTALISING SPECULATIONS

These hazardous speculations may also tie in with a few separate avenues of thought, such as the idea that the upper atmosphere hosts living beings (see **FT291:30-35**), perhaps composed of matter in the plasma state; that celestial bodies themselves are living beings, though not in the sense of protein-based or genetic life (James Lovelock; Mae-Wan Ho); or that all living beings are hooked up to the same electrical circuit of the Earth (Robert Becker).

I will be the first to admit that a 'post-Platonist' scenario along these lines is speculative in the extreme, if not quite preposterous, and, though perhaps superficially compelling, a very long way removed from proof. It can barely even be called a hypothesis. Even so, at least it represents an effort to understand near-death experiences in practical, down-to-earth terms of real and uncontroversial physics, unlike the tired, non-falsifiable and New Agey reliance on esoteric, science-fiction-like concepts such as black holes and wormholes.

Candace Savage, a Canadian writer on auroral physics, wondered: "Where science now traces the pathways of invisible particles in ineffable magnetic fields, members of traditional spirit-filled cultures thought they saw the progress of angels, departed ancestors and supernatural creatures. Which explanations are most accurate?" Just possibly, the answer may be: both. FT

RECOMMENDED READING

Anthony Peake, *Is there Life after Death? The Extraordinary Science of what Happens when we Die* (London: Arcturus, 2010)

Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death; A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980)

Candace Savage, *Aurora; The Mysterious Northern Lights* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995)

M. A. van der Sluijs, 'Three Ancient Reports of Near-Death Experiences: Bremmer Revisited', *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 27. 4 (2009), 223-253

Pim van Lommel, *Consciousness beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010)

Maureen Venselaar, *De (Bijna-)Dood Ontrafeld; In het Licht van de Fibonacci-Code* (Eeserveen: Akasha, 2011) (in Dutch)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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THE NAKED TRUTH

When he stumbled upon a mysterious engraving of a hairless hyaena that matched no living species known to science, **KARL SHUKER** was intrigued; but did it show a vanished species, a genetic freak or just a mangy specimen? And how might it relate to other weird hairless creatures in the cryptozoological annals?

ABOVE: The enigmatic 19th century engraving, labelled a "naked hyaena of the desert Africa".

Four species of modern-day hyaena are presently recognised by science – the spotted hyaena *Crocuta crocuta*, the striped hyaena *Hyaena hyaena*, the brown hyaena *Hyaena brunnea*, and the aardwolf *Proteles cristatus* – all four of which possess a respectable (and sometimes notably shaggy) pelage. This is why a recent, unexpected discovery of mine has left me decidedly perplexed.

Serendipity has played a significant part in several of my cryptozoological finds, and this latest one is no exception. While perusing the Internet in search of some 19th century engravings depicting a totally different type of animal, I happened upon the truly remarkable engraving reproduced here. As can be seen, the animal in question is labelled as a "naked hyaena of the desert Africa", and apart from sporting a dorsal mane, a tail tuft, some cheek fur, and some short hair running under its chin and along its throat, it does indeed appear to be naked. Yet as far as I am aware, no animal matching its bizarre appearance is known today.

> AS FAR AS I AM AWARE, NO ANIMAL MATCHING THIS DESCRIPTION IS KNOWN TODAY

Eager to learn more about this bald enigma, I searched for the engraving's original, published source. I found that the artwork

COVER / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Spotted hyaenas: far from naked. **BELOW:** A brown hyaena: positively shaggy.

had been prepared by a 19th century artist called Charles Hamilton Smith and then engraved by William Home Lizars, a celebrated Scottish engraver. It appeared as Plate XXVII in Volume II of Sir William Jardine's tome *The Natural History of Dogs... Including Also the Genera Hyaena and Proteles*, published in 1840. I was also able to trace online the relevant text concerning this mysterious hyaena from that volume, in which it had been categorised as a form of the striped hyaena. On page 278, its description then read as follows:

THE NAKED HYAENA OF THE DESERTS OF NUBIA

Hyaena vulgaris [a commonly-used synonym of Hyaena hyaena]

This race is small and gaunt, entirely destitute of hair, excepting the mane on the ridge of the neck and back. The bare skin is of a purplish black, the body is short, and the tip of the tail is furnished with a small brush.

I would have expected an animal as visually arresting as this to be extensively documented. Yet despite a diligent search online and through every relevant publication in my not-inconsiderable personal zoological library, I have so far been unable to uncover any additional information, not even the briefest of mentions. It is as if it never existed. So how can Nubia's anomalous naked desert hyaena be explained, and what has happened to it?

IN SEARCH OF THE NAKED NUBIAN

As Jardine classed it as a form of the striped hyaena, the naked desert hyaena presumably belonged to the latter's Nubian subspecies, *Hyaena hyaena dubbah*, which does inhabit desert fringes (though not the interiors of true deserts) and sub-desert terrain. However, this subspecies possesses a normal, uniformly fully-furred pelage. Could it be, therefore, that the naked desert hyaena was based upon some freak, near-hairless individuals, yielding a local non-taxonomic variety? Or (as a less plausible but more zoologically-intriguing alternative option) did it constitute a discrete race, distinct from the typical Nubian striped hyaena, which may have bred true? If the latter were correct, then the naked desert hyaena would surely have represented a valid subspecies in its own right.

Yet as I am not aware of any evidence suggesting that this extraordinary form still survives today, the prospect of the naked desert hyaena being a non-taxonomic freak variety of the Nubian striped hyaena seems the more rational of these two options, with its limited number of specimens simply dying out without perpetuating their strain. After all, bare skin is hardly an advantageous feature for a surface-dwelling desert mammal's successful existence beneath an unrelenting blazing sun, and is unlikely, therefore, to be actively selected for via evolution's 'survival of the fittest' *modus operandi*.

The cause of a freak hairless variety's nakedness would surely be the expression of some form of mutant gene allele. Such a situation is responsible for hairlessness in a number of other mammalian species, though different mutant alleles cause hairlessness in different species (i.e. this condition is not caused by one and the same allele across the entire spectrum of species known to exhibit freak hairlessness).

Having considered genetic options, there are also some epigenetic (externally induced) possibilities to consider. Foremost of these is that in reality, Nubia's naked desert hyaena consisted of individuals suffering from some form of skin ailment, such as mange (caused

by tiny parasitic mites), whose debilitating effects might also explain their small body size and gaunt appearance. In other words, these creatures' growth may have been stunted due to ill health, reducing their ability to find food. Having said that, on first sight, the distribution of hair on the animal depicted in the engraving seems far too regular to be explained in this way. Mange-infected animals often have irregular, inconsistently distributed patches of hairlessness.

In the most severe cases of mange, however, sometimes the only fur remaining on an infected animal is a prominent line of hair running down its neck and along its back, a ruff around its neck extending from behind its ears and over its cheeks down to its chin and throat, and sometimes a tuft at the end of its tail. This description perfectly corresponds with the distribution of hair described by Jardine for Nubia's naked desert hyaena and depicted in the engraving.

Consequently, I consider it most likely that this latter mystery beast, long banished from the annals of natural history, was merely based upon one or more specimens of mange-ridden, under-nourished hyaena that had been out-competed by bigger, fitter, healthier hyaenas in the less environmentally-adverse areas at the fringes of Nubia's desert, and had thus been forced to seek sanctuary amid this desert's more arid, less hospitable interior instead.

BLUE DOGS AND BALD BEARS

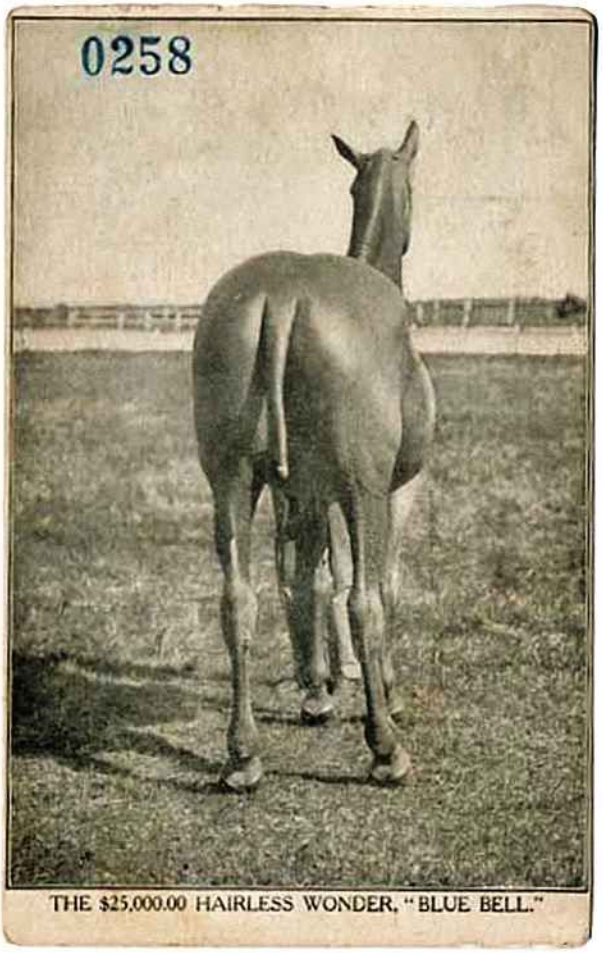
Support for this theory comes from an ostensibly unexpected cryptozoological source – the chupacabra; or, to be more precise, from the so-called hairless blue dogs of Texas that have been frequently if erroneously identified as blood-sucking chupacabras, especially in media reports

THE ISLE OF WIGHT MONSTER WAS SAID TO HAVE THE HEAD OF A LION

(**FT199:48-49**). The most famous example is the specimen that rancher Phylis Canion found dead just in front of her ranch outside the small Texas town of Cuero on 14 July 2007 (**FT280:42-44**). DNA samples were taken, which identified it as a coyote, albeit one that apparently possessed at least a smidgen of Mexican wolf ancestry too, thereby suggesting that a degree of hybridisation had occurred between these two species at some stage in this creature's family tree.

Media reports regularly state that its blue-grey skin was completely hairless when it was discovered. However, as he disclosed when investigating this intriguing animal, chupacabra researcher Ben Radford noted that photographs taken of it by Canion on the day that she found it outside her home clearly showed a conspicuous line of hair running from behind its ears down its neck and along the centre of its back. This is of course a classic indication of the presence of mange, and other 'hairless blue dogs' on record have presented a similar appearance.

Also very pertinent to this subject is the so-called 'Isle of Wight Monster' that had been scaring people there since early autumn 1939, and was said by eyewitnesses to possess the head of a lion. When it was finally snared and shot on 16 February 1940, however, the IoW Monster proved to be nothing more exotic than an old fox with very advanced mange that had left a ruff of hair



ABOVE: Hairless oddities (clockwise from top): The Wise County 'chupacabra' – a hairless raccoon found dead on a golf course in Wise County, Texas; the 'Blue Dog of Texas' found by rancher Phylis Canion; Wild Nell, the 'India-rubber skinned mare'; and Blue Bell the '$25,000 hairless wonder'.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Andean spectacled bear Dolores, previously fully-furred, in her enclosure at Leipzig zoo in 2009. Similar hair loss struck other captive bears around the world. **TOP RIGHT:** The hairless Mexican xolo, congenitally bald.

around its neck, resembling a lion's mane, but very little fur elsewhere on its body.

Providing a useful contrast, in January 2010 a completely hairless raccoon was found dead on the Runaway golf course in Wise County, Texas, where it had quite likely frozen to death in the wintry weather. Originally, it was assumed to have been suffering from mange, but when examined by biologists this was found not to be the case; its highly unusual condition was most probably congenital (as is also true with the xolo, Mexico's famous hairless dog breed), emphasising that mange does not generally reduce an individual to a state of total hairlessness.

Another interesting specimen of relevance here is the horse with soft velvet-like skin of a lilac-blue shade and totally lacking not only hair but also hair follicles that was discovered in South Africa by a merchant called Lashmar during 1860. He spied it among a herd of quagga (the semi-striped subspecies of plains zebra that became extinct in 1883), captured it, and brought it back to England in 1863, where it was exhibited at London's Crystal Palace during February 1868. What has never been determined is whether this remarkable animal was truly a domestic horse (if so, where had it come from?) or, more logically, a freak hairless quagga (thereby explaining why it was associating with quaggas).

Irrespective of its precise taxonomic identity, it was the first of many hairless equine individuals to be publicly displayed down through the years. Others of prominence include Caoutchouc – a black, entirely hairless feral horse (even lacking eyelashes) with skin resembling India-rubber that had been captured in Australia and was displayed widely around the world during the 1870s; and two individuals from the 1890s. One of these was Wild Nell, dubbed the 'India-rubber skinned mare'. The other was Blue Bell, the $25,000 'hairless wonder'. As with the totally hairless raccoon from Texas and the Mexican hairless dog, these horses' complete absence of hair was due to the expression of a mutant gene allele, not to any external skin complaint.

A fourth explanation for freak hairlessness is influence by non-pathological external factors, such as climate and diet – and this is the explanation favoured by experts for the gradual but ultimately near-total loss of hair suffered by three female Andean spectacled bears housed at Germany's Leipzig Zoo and previously fully-furred. Their plight and grotesque appearance hit media headlines worldwide during late 2009, but it transpired that a similar phenomenon had struck a number of other, unrelated spectacled bears in captivity elsewhere around the world too – thereby eliminating a common source of infection or a shared genetic fault from consideration.

In short, hairlessness in mammals can be caused by a number of different factors, but judging from its specific appearance I still favour mange or some comparable skin infection as the most reasonable explanation for the naked desert hyaena of Nubia.
To my knowledge, this is the first case of hairlessness in hyaenas that has ever been brought to cryptozoological attention, and does not even appear to have featured in any mainstream zoological works since Jardine's tome.

Indeed, it is this very state of being conspicuous only by its absence that lends further support to the likelihood that this hyaena is – or was – a short-lived, unrepeated, pathologically-induced curiosity rather than a genetically-engendered, non-taxonomic curiosity or local variety, or a distinct taxonomic race. For if any of the latter possibilities were correct, I am certain that something not only as morphologically memorable as a near-hairless hyaena but also of such potential genetic and evolutionary significance would have attracted scientific interest, leading to this beast's continued documentation in the zoological literature.

Instead, like so many other wildlife oddities, Nubia's naked desert hyaena was only of brief, passing interest, and no doubt vanished from existence soon afterwards anyway, thereafter to be forgotten for generations until I happened by chance to uncover what seems to be the only illustration ever prepared of this fascinating creature, and realised that here was a forgotten treasure from the dark vaults of unnatural history that richly deserved to be retrieved and redisplayed. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

KARL SHUKER is a zoologist, cryptozoologist and author. He currently lives in the Midlands, where he works as a zoological consultant and writer. A regular FT columnist he is also the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Cryptozoology*.

THE FIRST FORTEANS

11. EGO RISING – ARTHUR C CLARKE

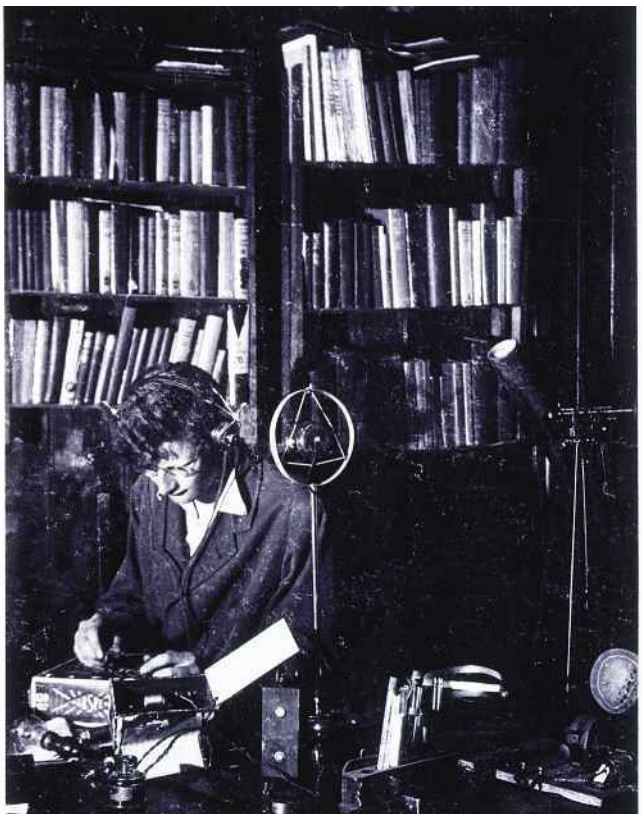
Who were the First Forteans? British fortean lineage began in the early 1930s, when Charles Fort was still alive and his books quite rare in these isles. **BOB RICKARD** continues his rummage for our fortean roots.

Some may find it surprising that I consider Arthur C Clarke (ACC) among the true forteans, given his later criticisms of Fort, but there can be no doubt about his involvement with Eric Frank Russell (EFR) and Hal Chibbett; together, they form the three fortean amigos who weave in and out of our history, keeping in touch with each other well into the late 1960s.

When ACC incorporated phenomena and experience anomalies into his writing, he was far more subtle than EFR and probably influenced the imaginations of his readers to a far greater extent. It is important, therefore, to understand ACC's change from tolerating a 'paranormal' interpretation of anomalies – as utilised by EFR and Chibbett – to a more pragmatic view.

This change might seem paradoxical from someone who declared, in his famous Third Law – that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (*Profiles of the Future,* 1962) – but I like to believe he instinctively knew that these were not two opposing things, but the same thing seen from two different viewpoints; and that, to paraphrase Fort, the greater science is the more inclusive one. He can't be faulted simply for feeling frustrated that the 'paranormal' did not yield to his scientific curiosity – for example, he reasoned that "if there really was something in telepathy, ESP, etc, it would have been proved by now without doubt." [1]. Solving problems in physics and engineering was far more rewarding for Clarke, as his list of remarkable inventions and enduring writing has demonstrated.

Arthur Charles Clarke could not have had a more promising beginning for a fortean. The eldest of four children, he was born on 16 December 1917, in Minehead, Somerset. In the late-1920s, his father, a post office telecoms engineer, and mother, a telegraph operator, both retired, bought a farm near Bishops Lydeard that is still owned by the family. He had a happy time, describing himself as "a "grubby little farm boy" whose passion for fossils was inspired by collecting a series of 'cigarette cards' on dinosaurs. Aged 11 in 1928, he was sent to a grammar school in Taunton, where he became a "precocious swot". [2]



SSPL VIA GETTY IMAGES

THE 'PARANORMAL' DID NOT YIELD TO HIS SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY: "IF THERE REALLY WAS SOMETHING IN TELEPATHY IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PROVED BY NOW WITHOUT DOUBT"

LEFT: Clarke aged about 18 in his study at home in Somerset. **BOTTOM:** On 17 July 1938, members of the BIS gathered at the home of RA Smith in South Chingford, on the outskirts of London, to honour the visit of Robert C Truax of the American Rocket Society. Truax, a midshipman of the US Navy, was working at an experimental station at Chesapeake Bay and in the UK on a training cruise. In the lineup are Eric Burgess and Harry Turner from the Manchester interplanetary Society (2nd and 3rd from left); Truax (holding equipment); and Maurice Hanson and Arthur Clarke (last two on right).

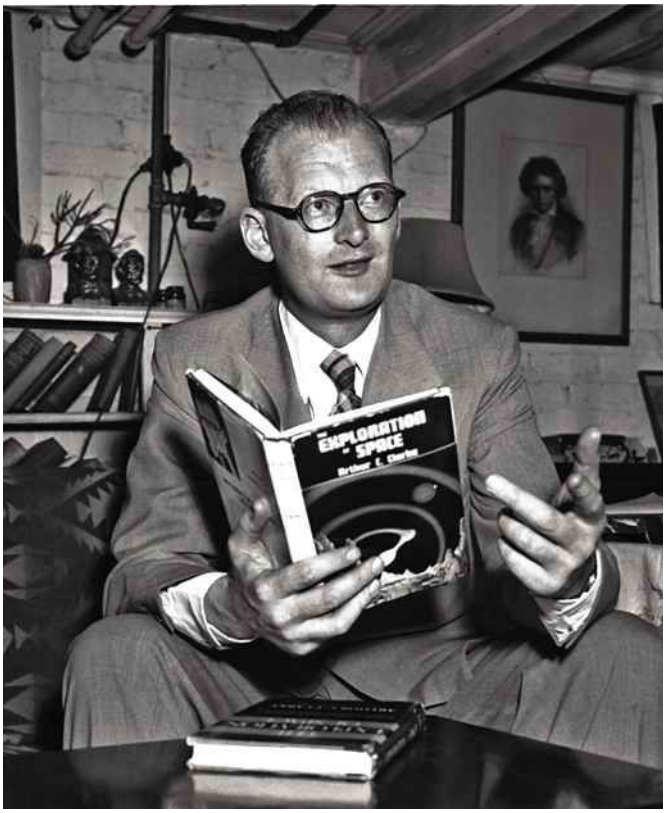
In November that same year, he had his first sight of a science-fiction magazine. It was owned by a neighbour, who let the lad benefit from his subscription to *Astounding*. ACC's own interest in engineering, he wrote, owed much to his grandmother's hand-powered knitting machines, which "fascinated" him. She also stimulated his curiosity by lending him books such as Ignatius Donnelly's two bestsellers: *Antediluvian World* (1882) – which he later called "a masterpiece of spurious scholarship, the veracity of which I did not doubt for a moment" – and *Ragnarok: The Age of Fire and Gravel* (1883). These introduced young Arthur to such ideas as Atlantis and the ancient civilisations descended from its ruin, cometary impacts, European artefacts in America, and to Bacon writing Shakespeare. Donnelly should be "the patron saint of the peddlers of UFO/Parapsychology mind-rot," tut-tutted the older ACC.

Clarke, like many an SF fan from those days, remembered "hunting for US pulps among the 'literary dross' at Woolworths." He also read, avidly, British boys' magazines as well as "real books", such as those by Verne, Wells, Rider-Haggard and Conan Doyle. By 1931, he was building his own telescopes and trying to map the Moon, as well as indexing his magazine collection. He joined the British Interplanetary Society (BIS) by post in 1934, and at some point began corresponding with other UK fans whenever he spotted their addresses in the letter columns of US magazines. He made contact with Walter Gillings, who would found London's first SF group in 1937.

1936 was particularly significant for the 19-year-old's career as a scientist and writer. He moved from a part-time job in his mother's old profession as a telephone switchboard operator to a full-time job in the civil service in London. This same year, the headquarters of the BIS relocated to London and ACC soon became their secretary. After a period in a tiny flat in Paddington, he moved into the famous flat in Grays Inn Road, with Bill Temple and Maurice Hanson, becoming one of the London Circle regulars.[3] By the time war broke out in September 1939, Clarke had assiduously corresponded with a prodigious number of scientists and writers in the US, including Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Willy Ley and John Campbell.

In the last instalment, I left Sid Birchby sighing at the attrition of London's SF fandom, in 1940, by the combined efforts of conscription, enlistment, rationing, evacuation and the Blitz. Clarke, on the other hand, is on record as saying: "I could not have done a better job of avoiding WWII". The 23-year-old Clarke had barely settled into his job as an executive officer in HM Exchequer & Audit, in London's Whitehall, when his department was evacuated to Colwyn Bay, North Wales; there he "sat out the Blitz checking the accounts of the Ministry of Food".

The mundane task of tending to the Hollerith punched-card sorters that produced the nation's ration cards soon palled and his love of astronomy propelled him to enlist in the RAF the following year. After basic training at Aldgate, in London, ACC wanted to learn celestial navigation but was sent to the Radio School in Wiltshire, where he absorbed as many of the technical specialities that proved crucial to him in this period of intense intellectual growth, during which he also established himself as a writer of short SF stories.



ABOVE: The American poet Joy-Davidman-Gresham attended White Horse meetings and gave CS Lewis a copy of Clarke's *Childhood's End*. **BELOW:** ACC and the book that brought him fame beyond the SF fandom, *The Exploration of Space* (1951).

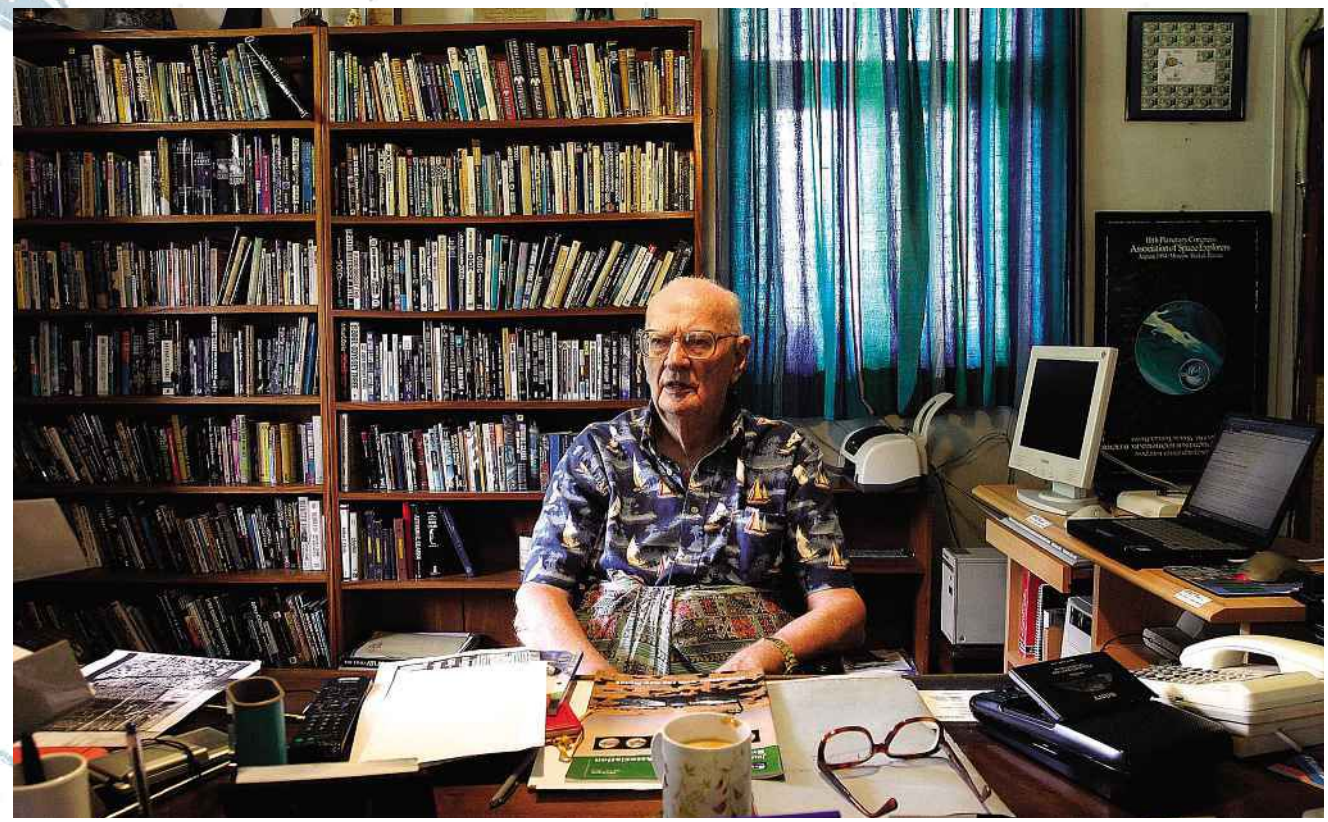
In all his RAF postings – the later ones as an instructor – ACC made no secret of his role as a British Interplanetary Society (BIS) executive, becoming notorious for his skill at table tennis as well as his relentless enthusiasm for SF, rockets and space. He later wrote, "I was in a position to indoctrinate hundreds of hapless airmen, and made the most of the opportunity. For some odd reason, my service nickname was 'Spaceship'." One of those airmen was one of the original Manchester 'rocket boys', Harry Turner, who, like Clarke, found himself training for radar-detection.[4]

By late 1943, ACC had been re-assigned to the Davidstow station near Tintagel, Cornwall, where a group of "wild young scientists" from MIT, led by Nobel-Prize winner Luis Alvarez, was demonstrating a new type of radar. Here too, Spaceship Clarke was kept away from the war, allowing him to "work out the principles of communication satellites" that he published in 1945.

While working on the radar prototypes, ACC began corresponding with CS Lewis, whose sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), had just been published. As the leading champion of spaceflight – and later as chairman of the BIS – ACC took Lewis to task for his cynicism about the potential benefits of rocketry and about scientists in general. In *Perelandra*, for example, Lewis refers to "little rocket societies" bent upon exporting the crimes of mankind to other planets, and condemns as "absurd, ignored or derided by intellectuals" the whole idea of interplanetary travel.

Their friendly but adversarial correspondence continued until, in February 1953, Lewis reluctantly agreed to meet Clarke in an Oxford pub, hoping it was not "a plan to abduct me and leave me on an asteroid". Clarke, according to his brief account, turned up at the Eastgate pub with his lifelong friend Val Cleaver (who also did a stint as president of the BIS), and Lewis brought along his colleague JRR Tolkien. "A fine time was had by all," ACC recalls, "and, when some hours later, we emerged a little unsteadily… Dr Lewis' parting words were 'I'm sure you're very wicked people, but how dull it would be if everyone was good'."[5]

From the end of the war, commercial and military development of radar and communications satellites soared like one of ACC's beloved rockets. An essay on "The rocket and the future of warfare" – written shortly after the atom-bombs dropped on Japan, and introducing the concept of mutually assured destruction – won a contest run by the *RAF Quarterly* and turned ACC's thoughts towards writing professionally. He enrolled at London University's King's College for a three-year course in pure and applied maths and physics, taking it in two years and graduating in 1948 with first-class honours. For his third year, he tried astronomy, but was so bored by the pedestrian tutorials that he jumped at the



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ABOVE: A portrait of ACC in his office in Colombo, 2003. **FACING PAGE:** Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse pays his last respects to Clarke at his home in Colombo on 20 March 2008. Ninety-year-old ACC had died at a hospital in the Sri Lankan capital the day before.

chance to become Assistant Editor of the prestigious *Physics Abstracts*, then published by the Institute of Electrical Engineers and staffed by some of Britain's top physicists.

While all this was going on, ACC was writing with an intensity few could match; the 1950s was his most fertile period and included many of the stories for which he is famous. Of particular interest is the little known moment when film director David Lean took Clarke out to lunch in 1952. Lean discussed filming *Childhood's End* but went on to make *Bridge on the River Kwai* instead.

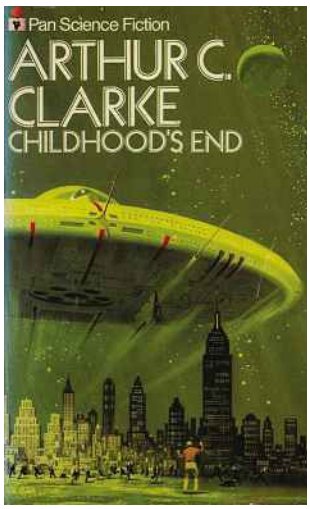
In the same period, the London Circle of SF fans was re-established, its meetings becoming more regular and better attended. It was at one such gathering at the White Horse, in 1950, that ACC met ex-sailor Mike Wilson. Clarke was so impressed with Wilson's diving adventures in the Far East that he took up the sport himself and, as he did with his other interests, soon excelled at it. The pair became fast friends and diving buddies, and went into business together in the 1960s.

Despite enjoying his editorial job – "every important journal in every language passed across my desk" – ACC found that it

DAVID LEAN TOOK CLARKE OUT TO LUNCH IN 1952. LEAN DISCUSSED FILMING *CHILDHOOD'S END*, BUT WENT ON TO MAKE *THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI* INSTEAD

was "interfering with earning a living"; which shows the extent to which contracts for writing, appearing on the new BBC TV service [6] and lecturing were fast becoming his major source of income. By 1949, he was able to buy a house in north London, which became the family base away from Somerset. He left the shelter of *Physics Abstracts* and began writing his first non-fiction book, *Interplanetary Flight* (1950) – a book that Carl Sagan said "was a turning point in my scientific development."

There were many more important milestones for ACC, not least his technical expansion of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's 'space elevator' and his own development of the 'electromagnetic linear accelerator' for launching in space without rockets. Against the backdrop of such success, the failure of his brief marriage, in 1953, to 22-year-old Marilyn Mayfield-Torgenson, a social director of a marine club in Florida, was a blow more



mystifying than stunning. They had met during ACC's second tour of the US, during which he began, or renewed, enduring friendships with many well-known SF writers, scientists and space pioneers (including Wernher von Braun, whom he encouraged to take up scuba-diving). The Clarkes returned to London and, by the end of the year (1953), they had separated. They were simply incompatible: he lost in his 'work' most of the time and she, an unsophisticated socialite, "had no idea what a writer's life was like". The final straw had been a discussion about religion, in which they were mutually shocked to discover that he was a dedicated atheist and she was a devout Presbyterian.

In effect, relieved of his need to spend time on his marriage, ACC threw himself into the new and attractive opportunities for writing, research and travel that were opening up. An extensive tour of top diving spots off Australia and other parts of the Far East with his pal Mike Wilson convinced Clarke to set up home in Sri Lanka. The rest of his story is well dealt with elsewhere, so I'd like to return to his comments upon Fort and his books.

In his 1989 collection of critical reminiscences, *Astounding Days*, ACC pays tribute to Eric Frank Russell, acknowledging him as "Charles Fort's most fervent advocate in the United kingdom." Like Russell, ACC had discovered Fort in the pages of *Astounding*'s April 1934 issue, when it serialised, in eight parts, Fort's third book, *Lo!* (1931). It is probable that Clarke first met

EFR in 1936, when he'd come up to London occasionally for fan meetings. Clarke also thanked EFR for his "encouragement in my early career". This must have been during 1937, when Clarke began to write short stories, or the following year, when EFR was working on *Sinister Barrier*.[7]

And here we come to a conundrum, for ACC seems quite ambivalent when he tries to assess the value of Fort's work. He echoes Martin Gardner's sentiment when he wrote: "I consider [forteans]… to be ignorant and opinionated science-bashers," but then praises Fort's "wry sense of humour and refusal to take himself seriously [which] excused his many faults." Again, after declaring that he "found [Fort's] eccentric, even explosive, style stimulating and indeed mind-expanding," Clarke goes on to complain: "Despite his avowed scepticism, [Fort] continually promotes the theory – totally absurd in the 1930s or even in the 1830s – that the stars and planets are really quite close, and the Earth is surrounded by some kind of shell from which material occasionally falls."[8]

It is clear that Clarke, like so many others, likes Fort's data but not his "mind-expanding" style, for he goes on to say, with some puzzlement, "yet many of the news items dug up by Fort in his decades of research seem to be quite inexplicable – *if* they are true." Clarke certainly didn't like the way Fort treated the astronomers of his day: "If Fort had lived to see men walk on the Moon he would have to eat a good many of his sarcastic words about astronomers. Scepticism is one thing; stupidity is another."[9]

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In general, Clarke's verdict on all four of Fort's books seems deliberately obtuse: he calls them "wonderful browsing fodder" but asserts that "anyone trying to read from end to end would suffer from acute mental indigestion". That did not stop him from crediting Fort with inspiring the TV series *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World*, its two sequels and three books co-authored with BBC producers John Fairley and Simon Welfare.

Of his most memorable novels, his second, *Childhood's End* (1953) – in which mysterious alien Overlords oversee the psychical (but not necessarily spiritual) 'ascension' of mankind – was partly inspired by his early interest in psychical research, which had undoubtedly been informed by his friendship with Hal Chibbett in the 1930s,[10] but whether he accompanied Chibbett on his investigations of paranormal phenomena, as EFR did, I have not been able to discover. Certainly, ACC knew that John W Campbell – his friend and editor of *Astounding* – had taken part in JB Rhine's famous experiments in ESP in the mid-1930s, while majoring in physics at Duke University. I suspect that making his Overlords look like Satan was part of Clarke's existential duel with CS Lewis.

Clarke's natural pragmatism increasingly distanced him from what he regarded as *Astounding*'s "infatuation" with anti-gravity drives, ESP and Dianetics. He wrote, with some regret: "In later years, it [the paranormal] became almost an obsession, and the magazine was so full of stories about psi that many readers (including this one) became restive." FT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their generous help, my thanks go to the SF fan historians and archivists who went out of their way to preserve the correspondence, images, fanzines and reports of the day. Chief among those are Rob Hansen's FIAWOL archive: www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/; Philip Turner for permission to use images from Harry Turner's Footnotes to Fandom archive: www.htspweb.co.uk/fandf/romart/het/footnotes.htm. As before, a more referenced version will appear eventually at the CFI blogsite: http://blogs.forteana.org

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2 Most of my details of ACC's early life are culled from Neil McAleer biography of him, *Odyssey* (1992).

3 See FF9 'The pubs at the end of the Universe', **FT320:48-50.**

4 Harry Turner, "Footnotes to Fandom: Remembering Eric Frank Russell", www.htspweb.co.uk/fandf/romart/het/footnotes/efr.htm. Turner writes that he first met EFR, "15 years my senior," at a historic meeting of the BIS in July 1938. ACC also attended.

5 Details of this historic pub conclave are very hard to find, however a good account is given (in Italian) by Michele Crudele, in his general account of their "little known dialogue" – "*CS Lewis e Arthur C. Clarke: un dialogo poco conosciuto*" (July 2011) at www.disf.org/editoriali/2011-07. Lewis and Clarke did not correspond beyond 1954, but there is evidence of their contact via other people. Relevant to our chronicle is that one go-between was the American writer Joy Davidman Gresham, who married CS Lewis in 1956 (as dramatised in various plays and films). She made a habit of regularly attending the London Circle meetings at the White Horse every week and, according to Crudele, "It was she who gave Lewis a copy of Clarke's *Childhood's End*."

6 ACC is credited with giving the first and possibly longest unbroken live talk on British television when he spoke for 20 minutes on 'The fourth dimension', holding his audience's interest "despite the abstruse nature of the subject". McAleer, *Odyssey*, p75.

7 Of EFR, Clarke wrote: "He was a big, energetic man with a ribald sense of humour… [I've lost] his long letters, written in one of the most beautiful hands I've ever come encountered… I owe him many debts, for he was my first literary collaborator and my first source of income from writing. Some of his early stories used ideas that I provided and he paid me promptly and generously." Clarke, *Astounding Days,* pp133-135. By 1939, EFR had already lost interest in the BIS, becoming more involved with the US forteans. See FF5: "Eric Frank Russell, pt2", in **FT312:48-51.**

8 Clarke, *Astounding Days,* pp108-109. It seems to me that Clarke failed to understand that Fort had no real investment in promoting alternative theories, or that he used them, on occasion, as rhetorical 'stalking horses' or as satires of some equally ridiculous explanations that some scientists had come out with to explain or rationalise a reported anomaly that challenged their current understanding of things. Again, he seems not to have seen that Fort's sarcasm was specifically directed – not at scientists generally – but at those scientists who behave unscientifically and autocratically. In a pertinent example, Clarke cites a "Goose zapped by meteorite" report from the *BAA Journal* v97 n5 p257 (Aug 1987), in which 'experts' had dismissed the meteorite theory in favour of "some unusual form of atmospheric electricity" [this] "would have provoked scornful comment from Fort". ACC then does exactly that, commenting scornfully: "I have a simpler explanation. I think the Star Warriors were playing with one of their latest toys, and have sent a stiff note of protest to my friends in the Pentagon". Clarke, *Astounding Days,* pp110-111.

9 What Clarke is bristling at, I gather, is what he perceives as a lack of respect for the type of practical science and scientists that he himself is acquainted with. Hence he was able to be far more charitable about William Corliss, calling him "Fort's latter-day, and much more scientific, successor [who] unlike Fort, selects his material almost exclusively from scientific journals." Clarke, *Astounding Days,* p.110. Curiously, his biography at the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) has, as one of ACC's utterances: "Some of my best friends are astronomers and I'm sorry to keep throwing stones at them."

10 See FF2: "Round-robins of the damned", in **FT310:50-51.**

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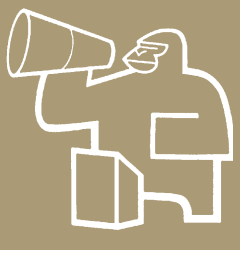

The myth of living fossils

MARK GREENER argues that it's time to retire an outdated biological conceit

MARK GREENER is a medical writer as well as clinical editor and columnist for *Pharmacy Magazine* and writes regularly for a wide variety of magazines, including FT.

Living fossils probably don't exist. I'm not discussing whether Mokèlé-mbèmbé is a sauropod, Nessie a plesiosaur, or Sasquatch a Gigantopithecus. But the phrase 'living fossil' should retire in peace and neither bother mainstream biologists nor undermine cryptozoology's credibility ever again.

Darwin, who coined the phrase, suggested that living fossils come from "a confined area" and, therefore, faced "less severe competition" than species elsewhere. In modern terms, a living fossil is a species that shows "limited recent diversification and high morphological stasis over long periods of evolutionary time".[1] In other words, living fossils have not moved far or changed much for a long time. According to the wife, this makes me a living fossil. At least I'm in good company.

Cycads and Ginkgo biloba are botanical 'living fossils'. The University of California Museum of Palæontology calls monoplacophorans – a type of mollusc – "Living fossils from the ocean deep". Biologists thought monoplacophorans died out during the Palæozoic (542.0 to 251.0 million years ago) until their rediscovery in 1952. Other living fossils include the cœlacanth, tuatara, horseshoe crabs and Notostraca (tadpole or shield shrimp). Notostraca's relatively rich fossil record dates back to the early Devonian (416.0 to 397.5 mya). Biologists separate Notostraca into two genera, Triops and Lepidurus. Today's Notostraca species are "indistinguishable from fossils of Triops from the Triassic" (251.0 to 199.6 mya) and "Lepidurus from the Jurassic" (199.6 to 145.5 mya).[2] So, Notostraca appear to be prime contenders for being living fossils. Appearances are, however, deceptive. Researchers recently used sophisticated molecular and computer models to reconstruct the evolutionary history of 38 existing Notostraca species. This evolutionary back-calculation showed "multiple global radiations and high species turnover". One radiation – where Notostraca spread worldwide and diversified into various species – was, in evolutionary terms, relatively recent: about 73 mya. This is around the time of the K-Pg mass extinction that wiped out the dinosaurs and opened ecological niches that allowed mammals to spread and diversify into creatures as different as a duck-billed platypus and a polar bear. The same cataclysm seems to have given Notostraca the chance to spread and diversify. This "pattern of diversity" is, the researchers say, "incompatible with Darwin's original" use of living fossil.[3] Studies of cycads, nautiloids, horseshoe crabs, monoplacophorans and cœlacanths also suggest that these "living fossils" may be more modern than biologists initially thought.

ABOVE: The cœlacanth – poster child for living fossils.

The fossil evidence may be less convincing that it first seems even for the cœlacanth, the 'living fossil' poster child. Fossilised cœlacanths are remarkably diverse, ranging from less than 0.1m (Holoptychius) to more than 2m (Mawsonia) long with markedly different body shapes. Unfortunately, we don't have fossils of the two existing cœlacanth species or even members from the same genus (Latimeria). And Latimeria differs markedly from fossils of its closet relative (Macropoma).[4] It's hard to say that Latimeria is a living fossil without a comparison from the same species or at least the same genus. It's a bit like saying my pet cats are living fossils by comparing them to the remains of Smilodon, a sabre-toothed cat built like a tiger on steroids.

The genetic evidence is also mixed. To account for living fossils, biologists need to assume that evolution slowed markedly, or even stopped (so-called genetic stasis). Certainly, some studies show little diversity on a molecular level in *Latimeria chalumnæ*, one of the two known surviving cœlacanth species. On the other hand, a recent paper summarised results from 12 genetic studies in cœlacanths. Four found evidence of slow evolution. The remaining eight, including the largest, did not.[5] In other words, we need more studies. In the meantime, cœlacanths seem to show little evidence for the dramatic evolutionary slowing required to produce living fossils.

Biologists' growing recognition of the importance of cryptic species further undermines the idea of living fossils. Animals that previous generations of biologists joined together, genetics and molecular studies are putting asunder. In other words, animals with very similar appearances can have very different genetics. We're only just beginning to appreciate how common cryptic species are: up to 30 per cent of species may be cryptic[6] and they seem evenly distributed throughout the animal kingdom and geographically.[7] Cryptic species illustrate how unreliable appearances – the foundation of the living fossil idea – can be.

Darwin knew nothing of molecular genetics, but he didn't believe that existing species would be identical to their ancestors, writing, for example, that the "anomalous forms *may almost* be called living fossils" (my italics). Later in *The Origin of Species*, Darwin wrote: "the progenitor will generally have differed in some respects from its modified descendants". Arguably, it's time for mainstream biologists, cryptobiologists and forteans to stop using the term living fossil until we have unambiguous evidence of genetic and anatomical stasis. Cryptobiologists have a tough enough time being taken seriously without using outmoded terminology.

Genetics and molecular biology have effectively converted 'living fossils' into 'conceptual fossils'. Indeed, the authors of a recent paper hope that their "review will contribute to dispelling the myth of the cœlacanth as a 'living fossil'". As they point out, biologists should "keep in mind that actual fossils are dead".[8] FT

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Nessie, Daughter of Kong?

CHARLES PAXTON argues that it is too simplistic to suggest that the Loch Ness Monster is the cultural offspring of the 1933 film *King Kong*

CHARLES PAXTON is a statistical ecologist at the University of St Andrews and has published a number of scientific papers on marine cryptozoological themes and runs www.sea-monster.info.

Some researchers of the Loch Ness monster have suggested [1] that Nessie arose as a cultural artefact of the worldwide publicity associated with release of the film *King Kong* in 1933. Most recently Daniel Loxton even went as far as to say: "*King Kong* directly inspired the Loch Ness monster". It seems a plausible hypothesis. *King Kong* was a popular film, released around the same time as the Loch Ness monster became a nationwide if not international phenomenon and it contains a long-necked creature (a sauropod dinosaur) that looks like the iconic image of the Loch Ness monster. Indeed a film review in the *Scotsman* (24 Oct 1933) refers to how Kong's island could have been home to the Loch Ness monster. However the story may be a little more complicated than it at first seems.

King Kong could have influenced the Loch Ness monster as a reported phenomenon in a number of (not mutually exclusive) ways:

A The reported phenomenon itself could have been initiated by the opening of *King Kong*.

B The phenomenon started independently of Kong, but the portrayal of the sauropod in *King Kong* could have influenced how the Loch Ness monster was reported.

C The suggestion that the Loch Ness monster phenomenon was a prehistoric animal could have come from the portrayal of the dinosaur in the film: i.e. *King Kong* affected the interpretation of Loch Ness monster reports by investigators.

D *King Kong* influenced the wider propagation and popularity of Loch Ness monster reports because of the interest in lost worlds and prehistoric creatures generated by the huge success of the film.

The first hypothesis can easily be disproved. Even if the evidence [2] for an earlier belief in a monster of Loch Ness is ignored as irrelevant to the subsequent phenomenon, the first contemporaneous accounts of what would become the Loch Ness monster occurred in the *Inverness Courier* in 1930. There is then a hiatus, until on 2 May 1933 we find the report, generally assumed to have been written by the occasional local correspondent and water-bailiff Alex Campbell, of the sighting of an anonymous couple (later exposed as Mr and Mrs Mackay of Drumnadrochit). The exact date of the sighting of Mrs Mackay (the primary witness) has been subject to debate, but the initial report (*Inverness Courier* 2 May) refers to the event happening on the previous Friday (28 April). At the very latest, the sighting could not have occurred later than 1 May. *King Kong* had opened at this point, but not in Scotland. The London *Times* and Manchester *Guardian* of 12 April 1933 refer to *King Kong* opening at the London Coliseum the following Monday (17 April) but *The Scotsman* (9 May) only mentions *King Kong* with reference to a "trade" showing (presumably a preview) on 4 May in Glasgow. It was a popular film, playing again as late as October at the (Edinburgh?) "Playhouse" (*Scotsman* 24 Oct). However, it is clear Mr and Mrs Mackay, let alone Alex Campbell, while they might have heard of *King Kong* from reading British national newspapers or listening to the radio, would not have seen the film unless they had been holidaying in England.

BELOW: Did the 1933 release of *King Kong* stimulate interest in 'lost world' monsters?

So if not the father of Nessie, was Kong the nursemaid? The peak number of reports from Loch Ness comes from 1934, when we know there were traffic jams around the loch, such was the popularity of monster hunting. This is a whole year after the release of *King Kong*. If *Kong* was the nursemaid, Nessie took a long time to be weaned. Nevertheless, did the idea of the Loch Ness monster as a prehistoric long-necked animal in the minds of both witnesses and interpreters arise from the portrayal of the water-based sauropod in *King Kong*? As Loxton observes, the earliest Nessie accounts make no mention of a neck; then, on 4 August (*Inverness Courier*), Mr G Spicer reported a Loch Ness monster on land – the first time a neck was reported in the context of the monster (the term "monster" of Loch Ness first appears in a letter to the *Inverness Courier* on 16 May by William Robertson, although there was a jocular reference to a monster in 1930). We know Spicer, a Londoner, had seen *King Kong* by November 1933, [3] so it seems plausible that he might have been influenced by the film. After August, there are two references to long-necked monsters in September and three in October, then in November there are a number of accounts published in a variety of Scottish newspapers of monsters with necks.

But other things were happening. In October, the Loch Ness monster became a Scottish national phenomenon.

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Reference to "Loch Ness" in the *Scotsman* jumps from a background level of 1-24 (Jan to Sept 1933) mentions per month to 40+ (Oct to Dec 1933). A similar increase in mentions occurred in the *Times* in December as Nessie became a British phenomenon. Meanwhile, *King Kong* finally opened in Inverness on 16 October (it ran until the 21st). Then, the *Scotsman* (10 Nov) announced that a certain Rupert Gould would be arriving at the loch (he was definitely at Inverness on the 13th, as reported by the *Inverness Courier*, 14 Nov 1933), researching what would become his book on the Loch Ness monster, and an implicit connection is made with his 1930 book *The Case for the Sea Serpent*, in which he argued for the existence of a long-necked sea serpent (although long necks are not mentioned in the newspaper report). For his subsequent Loch Ness monster book, [4] Gould interviewed some 34 witnesses in November 1933, of whom six pictured or reported a neck. The reports Gould collected in the book are seldom produced verbatim, thus allowing for the possibility of unintentional bias on the part of the author in how he interviewed witnesses or interpreted their statements; although a lot of eyewitness drawings are published and the proportion of long-necked monsters is roughly the same as that reported in newspapers in the same month. Of course, the witnesses could coincidently have seen something with a long neck; or the idea of a long-necked monster had entered popular consciousness from the recent local showing of *King Kong* in Inverness.

If the influence of *King Kong* on monster reports is unclear, then equally unclear is the role the film played in

Did interest in Nessie feed off the publicity for *King Kong*?

the interpretation of those reports. The first mention in print of the idea that the animal was a "plesiosaurus" (a class of extinct marine reptile with a long neck, not actually the animal in *King Kong*) that I can find are in comments possibly by Alex Campbell in the local (Highland) *Northern Chronicle* newspaper (9 August). Campbell also had a long-necked Loch Ness monster sighting himself in September; he subsequently thought it was of cormorants; and then, curiously, had exactly the same type of sighting under similar circumstances in May 1934; this time, he concluded it was not of birds. [5]

So the Kong-as-nursemaid-to-Nessie hypothesis depends crucially on one's interpretation of the gap between the British releases of the film and the large-scale appearance of Nessies with necks in November (a month after the *Scotsman* first went Nessie crazy) and one's view as to the role of Campbell and Gould, both of whom had an expectation of the Loch Ness monster being prehistoric by the end of summer of 1933.

Did interest in the Loch Ness monster feed off the publicity for lost world creatures generated by *King Kong*? Actually, despite *King Kong's* undoubted popularity, there is no evidence of increased media interest in the UK in monstrous or prehistoric matters in the aftermath of its release. If *Kong* had raised media consciousness of monsters, then one might expect an increase in mentions of monsters and prehistoric animals in spring and early summer, when the film was initially shown. References to "monsters" or "prehistoric" in the *Times* and *The Scotsman* do not increase substantially until the autumn of 1933, and then solely in the context of the Loch Ness monster. Yet we know that people were talking about the film. The *Northern Chronicle* first mentions the film two and a half weeks before it opened in Inverness and later explicitly states (18 Oct) that: "The fame of this extraordinary film had preceded it".

The coincidence in the timeframe of *King Kong* and the Loch Ness monster is notable, but the story is as murky as the sauropod swamp on Skull Island. People were reporting neckless monsters before *King Kong*. The Scottish newspapers was talking about plesiosaurs and Loch Ness just before *King Kong* opened in Inverness, but substantially after it had opened in Scotland. Gould was definitely thinking about long-necked aquatic monsters before the film's release, but his witnesses may have seen *King Kong* and/or been influenced by Gould's own long-necked monster expectations. How Campbell – whose activities, articles and memories from this period need an essay to themselves – was influenced by *King Kong*, we do not know.

So Nessie did not escape from Skull Island but is a native of Great Britain, albeit perhaps with mutations from *King Kong*. FT

ABOVE: Long-necked beasties: the sauropod monster from the 1933 *King Kong* and the classic 'plesiosaur' image from the 1934 'surgeon's photo'.

NOTES

1 See Daniel Loxton & Donald R Prothero, *Abominable Science* (Columbia University Press, 2013); Ronald Binns, *The Loch Ness Mystery Solved* (Prometheus, 1984); Adrian Shine, *Loch Ness* (Loch Ness Project, 2006).

2 Roland Watson, *The Water Horses of Loch Ness* (Watson, 2011).

3 Rupert T Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster* (Geoffrey Bles, 1933)

4 Ibid.

5 Tim Dinsdale, *The Story of the Loch Ness Monster* (Target, 1973).

For more on the genesis of the 1933 *King Kong*, see David Sutton, "The Ultimate in Adventure", **FT206:38-41**.

Pulling the Cosmic Trigger

IAN 'CAT' VINCENT reports from a two-day festival celebrating the life and work of Robert Anton Wilson. Its centrepiece was a glorious stage adaptation of *Cosmic Trigger* by Daisy Campbell, daughter of the late Ken.

IAN 'CAT' VINCENT is a lifelong student of the occult and a contributing editor at dailygrail.com. He lives in Yorkshire and blogs at catvincent.com and is on Twitter @catvincent.

"This is too important to take seriously."
Robert Anton Wilson (1932-2007)

This is not, and could never have been, an objective review. Robert Anton Wilson matters too much to me.

Wilson – writer, philosopher, occasional past *Fortean Times* contributor and woefully unsung cultural influence on everything from conspiracy theory to comic books – matters to Daisy Campbell, too. She literally would not be the woman she is today without him.

Daisy Eris Campbell was conceived backstage at the Liverpool School of Language, Music, Dream and Pun, during her father Ken Campbell's groundbreaking stage adaptation there in 1976 of Wilson and Robert Shea's novel *Illuminatus!* ("It was a long play," noted her mother, actress Prunella Gee.) Unsurprisingly, theatre was in Daisy's blood and drew her on to work with her father on his 24-hour-long adaptation of Neil Oram's *The Warp* and other productions.

A while after Ken's death in 2008, several people approached Daisy about the possibility of her directing a revival of *Illuminatus!* for the stage. This idea didn't appeal – but the string of synchronicity which had begun at the moment of her conception seemed to be tugging her towards doing *something* connected to both Wilson and Ken's work. Daisy's idea was to create a stage version of Wilson's autobiography *Cosmic Trigger: Final Secret of the Illuminati* which, since it included scenes from when Wilson came over to London to meet Ken and make a cameo appearance in the notorious Black Mass scene in *Illuminatus!*, would allow her to pay homage to both Wilson and her dad at the same time. The fact that Daisy had just reached the same age as her father when he mounted *Illuminatus!* was icing on the golden apple.

After getting both the blessing and the rights to the book from Wilson's surviving daughter, Daisy (along with co-conspirator John Higgs, author of the recent splendidly Discordian biography of The KLF, whose Bill Drummond worked on the *Illuminatus!* sets) took to the road to promote the entirely crowd-funded show and test out early scenes with a hopefully sympathetic audience. It's here that I enter the story.

In October of 2013 (on the 23rd, of course), Daisy and Higgs appeared at London's Horse Hospital venue with a pair of talks about Wilson and the production, and to offer a couple of preview scenes to view. I made a point of being there. Wilson had been a significant influence on me since my early teens, and I was delighted to see a revival of interest in his work, especially in times where rising dualistic us-and-them narratives trouble the globe... maybe a little of Wilson's multi-model approach and Gnostic Agnosticism re-entering the cultural conversation could help in some small way.

BELOW: The *Cosmic Trigger* flyer and Daisy Campbell.

The preview scenes – a meeting between Wilson, William Burroughs, Alan Watts and his wife at *Playboy Magazine* in 1968, and an interview with Ken Campbell during the *Illuminatus!* production – were smart, funny and hinted that the final production would be something special. Adding further interest was the news that writer, magician and Wilson fan Alan Moore would be contributing his recorded voice and visage to the play the role of the artificial intelligence FUCKUP.

Cut to 23 February 2014.

Daisy and Higgs brought their act to the Kazimer Theatre in Liverpool. With the crowdfunding well on course and the play close to having a finished script, the next question was: where to stage it? Daisy's first instinct was Liverpool, both for the connection to Ken's original and the synchronistic echoes with both the production and the life-changing vision of CG Jung, who had once dreamed that Liverpool, a city he had never visited, was the Pool Of Life. The Kazimer gathering was partly to share the progress, show some exclusive footage of Alan Moore talking about Wilson's influence on his attitudes to conspiracy theory and magic, and to air another preview scene: a recreation of Wilson's first LSD trip. All of these were spectacularly impressive – especially the LSD sequence, which employed clever scene-changes, music and a heart-rending performance from Oliver Senton as Wilson. By the end, it was clear that Liverpool was going to be the right place.

Following the performance, a group of us went to Mathew Street, just down from where the old Cavern Club had stood, to conduct a small street ritual at the bust of Jung (it was commissioned many years before by Peter O'Halligan,

AB PHOTOGRAPHY

founder of the Liverpool School of Language, Music, Dream and Pun). Being not unfamiliar with the idea of street magic, I suggested we combine the ritual with a calling upon the synchronistic powers of Alan Moore's Liverpool-born creation, John Constantine... and so we did. (For more about this event and ritual, see my *Daily Grail* post: http://tinyurl.com/cosmicliverpool)

By the time the play was ready for its first performance on 22 November at the Camp And Furnace venue in Liverpool's docklands, the weekend of its premiere had expanded considerably; Daisy and her cohorts not being the type to do things by halves, it was now going to be a two-day celebration of the thoughts and works of both Wilson and Ken Campbell.

The play itself began by setting out a new standard instruction for theatre: "Start with a striptease, and then build to a climax". The striptease is a recreation of the story of Ishtar, surrendering all her clothes and symbols before entering, naked and pure, into Hell. From there, Senton's Wilson takes up the tale of how he entered that most illuminating of Hells, The Chapel Perilous, from which one can only emerge as a paranoid or an agnostic.

There are many astonishing things about the Cosmic Trigger play itself: the sheer range of emotions and theatrical styles (from hilarity to tragedy, from crisp two-person dialogue scenes to full-blown song-and-dance numbers); the dedication and enthusiasm of the cast (all were excellent, but stand-outs were Senton, Kate Alderton as his wife Arlen, Josh Darcy as Ken Campbell and 15-year-old Dixie McDevitt, Daisy's daughter, as Luna Wilson); the back-projected sets by Scott McPherson combined with recreation of Bill Drummond's original *Illuminatus!* sets; Steve Fly's music, songs and live drumming. But one thing I especially appreciated was the skill with which Daisy has adapted Wilson's book with such fidelity, while not allowing it to fall into hagiography. Both Bob and Ken are shown as fragile, deeply human men, faults and all, and their work as the better for it. It is also likely to remain the only stage production in which a woman, playing her own mother, recreates the moment of her own conception.

The rest of the festival overflowed with joys. The evening show following the performance included outstanding work from a range of performers, including Ken's former lover & protégé Nina Conti, whose skilled and twisted ventriloquism routine had the audience crying with laughter, and music from TC Lethbridge and a DJ set from Youth of Killing Joke.

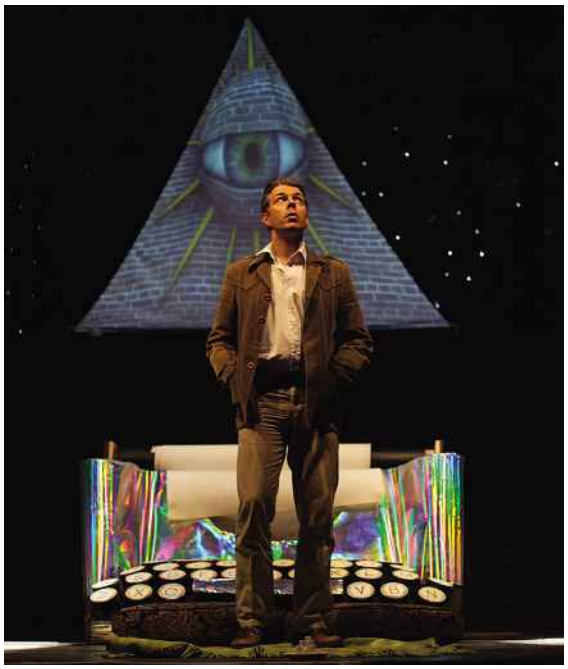
The Sunday – the 23rd, Harpo Marx's birthday – was no less significant, with a range of talks, workshops and performances. It began with a powerfully moving ritual to the Ancestors, given by Rupert and Claire Callender of the Green Funeral Company (www.thegreenfuneralcompany.co.uk). Speakers included Robert Temple (whose book *The Sirius Mystery* had been such an influence on Wilson and who coined the term 'Cosmic Trigger'), Discordian archivist Adam Gorightly and Robin Ince (who spoke movingly and hilariously about Wilson's angle on scepticism). The art show contained contributions from the likes of Jimmy Cauty, the other half of the KLF (who also designed the posters) and Melinda Gebbie. There were bands, DJ sets and a film show (which included one of Wilson's favourites, Orson Welles's *F For Fake*, and the first showing of the video of Alan Moore's *Moon and Serpent Grand Egyptian Theatre of Marvels* performance/ritual of 1994).

And then there was one final twist for me... when Daisy asked if I happened to be an ordained priest (I am – thanks, Universal Life Church!) because she had decided that it was the perfect day to marry her long time partner, Greg Donaldson: "All my friends are here!" It was half-improvised, a bit ramshackle in places... but, somehow, a *glorious* wedding. Much like the whole event.

Cosmic Trigger the play went on to a sold-out five-performance run in London the following week. Plans are being made for an international tour. Keep an eye on cosmictriggerplay.com for details.

Fnord. FT

AB PHOTOGRAPHY



JONATHAN GREET

"Start with a striptease, and then build to a climax"

ABOVE: Oliver Senton, as Robert Anton Wilson, enters the Chapel Perilous. **TOP:** A tripping Wilson encounters Albert Hofmann on his famous bicycle ride.

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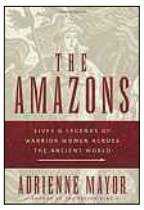
This month's books, films and games

reviews

More than boobs and battles

There's a lot more to the tattooed, trouser-wearing, binge-drinking, stoned and sexually voracious Amazons than the baseless myth that they lopped off a breast



The Amazons

Lives & Legends Of Warrior Women Across The Ancient World

Adrienne Mayor

Princeton University Press 2014

Hb, 502pp, illus, maps, bib, ind, $29.95, ISBN 9780691147208

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.99

Some ancient writers scoffed at the Amazons. In his *On Incredible Things*, Palæphatus (a fourth-century BC combination of Charles Fort and Mat Coward) declared that Amazons were simply cross-dressing men. Greek geographer Strabo (c.63BC–c.AD 24) also poured scorn on those who believed in these warrior women.

Despite Pierre Petit's 1685 declaration of belief (*De Amazonibus Dissertation*), relegation to the absurdities of Greek mythology has generally prevailed. Edward Tripp, in his *Handbook of Classical Mythology,* insisted: "It is now generally believed that the Amazons were wholly mythical", whilst Peter Walcot ('Greek attitudes towards Women: the Mythological Evidence', *Greece & Rome* **31**, 1984, p42 – not in Mayor) concluded: " The Amazons exist outside the range of normal human experience". Thus, they occupy the same level as Xena Warrior Princess, whose friend Gabriella was actually initiated into the Amazons in the 1995 episode 'Hooves and Harlots' – more lore than *Lawless*.

But many intelligent Greeks and Romans (e.g. Herodotus, Hippocrates, Plutarch, Julius Cæsar and various Christian Fathers) believed in them. Their credibility was enhanced by the existence of real-life warrior queens such as Artemisia (distinguished on the Persian side at Salamis), Boadicea, Teuta (still an Albanian national hero), and (geographically closest to the Amazons) Tomyris, who defeated and killed Cyrus the Great.

Everybody thinks they know one thing about the Amazons: lopping off one breast (or both), the better to aim and fire their arrows. This is based on an etymological blunder by the fifth-century BC historian Hellanikos, who Græcised their name with the derivation *a-mazos* = 'lacking a breast', a mistake unhappily perpetuated in Liddell & Scott's *Greek Lexicon*.

There are competing modern etymologies, the most popular being derivation from an ancient Iranian word meaning 'warrior'. As 12th-century Byzantine commentator John Tzetzes objected, cutting off a breast would cause fatal blood loss, a remark simultaneously sensible and misplaced. Most ancient texts (e.g., Quintus Curtius Rufus's biography of Alexander the Great) say Amazonian mastectomy was done by cauterisation. I choose Rufus because he describes a fortnight's fling (disbelieved by many others, says Plutarch) between Alexander and Amazon Queen Thalestris, in which she practically shagged him to death.

It is, anyway, a nonsense. Not one of the countless ancient vase-paintings of Amazons depict any missing mammaries, nor does Herodotus. And modern female Olympic toxophilites achieve

> **"Modern female toxophilites achieve world records without resorting to DIY mastectomies"**

world records without resorting to DIY mastectomies.

Mayor, whose earlier fortean-friendly books include *The First Fossil Hunters* and *Greek Fire* (see my **FT185** review), effectively clears all these decks. Chapter Five demolishes auto-mastectomy. She also adduces in meticulously documented detail the many recent archæological discoveries of mass graves of female warriors, not (she rightly emphasises) restricted to Greece, but found in China and across Asia, including Afghanistan. (How would the Taliban have coped?)

There's a lot more to Amazons than breasts and battles. In various intoxicating chapters, Mayor shows how they pioneered tattooing, anticipating modern girls' body art (CP Jones's classic article, *Journal of Roman Studies* **77**, 1987, pp139–55, deserved a mention), and trousers, foolishly disdained as 'uncivilised' by Greek and Roman men, who wore tunics without knickers, hence a lot of involuntary 'flashing' and togas.

Amazonian cannabis use, dancing (often nude), binge-drinking (Domique Kassab Tezgor's Sinope researches would have enriched Mayor on p142) and club-decibel music receive equally detailed and delightful attention. As do their erotic exploits, Amazonian girls being 'hot stuff' – Mayor scouts modern feminist attempts to recruit them as lesbians. Herodotus provides the best yarn. Scythian Amazons always timed their bowel-movements for noon – my school matron would have approved such regularity. Taking his chance, a young gallant followed one, chatted her up, she gave him more than he'd dared hope, and proposed a double-date for the next day, at which the coupling couples had a right old time. Herodotus adds a complementary rider: the Amazons quickly picked up Scythian lingo; the men remained tongue-tied monoglots. Mayor rightly expostulates at 1912 Oxford Herodotus commentators How & Wells's dismissal of their grasp – "inaccurate, as lady linguists often are".

Little carping scope. The poet Tryphiodorus is misdated; Etruscan civilisation is not completely "mysterious"; Mayor's suggested (correct) translation of Homer's Amazonian epithet *antianeirai* as "equals of men" was actually anticipated by Liddell & Scott, also Autenreith's *Homeric Dictionary*; a pity Euktemon ('Lovely Legs' – Nero's favourite) was left out of her catalogue of Amazon personal names – I'd love to have met Kepes ('Hot Flanks/ Sex Mad').

Mayor writes elegant, jargon-free, frequently witty prose, adorned with 14 colour plates, 72 black-and-white illustrations (look out for Katherine Hepburn got up as Queen Antiope in a 1932 Broadway musical), 10 maps, 44 pages of tersely informative end-notes, and a 17-page bibliography. Might seem churlish to bemoan omissions, and you never know if

Continued on p60

The Best of British...

A must-have page-turner for Quatermass completists contextualises the films and their writer, but the price is steep

Quatermass and the Pit

BFI Film Classic

Kim Newman

BFI/Palgrave MacMillan 2014
Pb, 112pp, illus, £12.99, ISBN 9781844577910
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

This in-depth study by film critic and fiction writer Kim Newman focuses on the Hammer Films version of *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967), directed by Roy Ward Baker and written by Nigel Kneale, who also penned the original BBC six-part serial of 1958–59.

The study is part of the BFI Film Classics series; however, it could easily have been written for the parallel series looking at classic television, as Newman also examines the origins of Professor Quatermass in the three original TV serials: *The Quatermass Experiment* (BBC, 1953); *Quatermass II* (BBC, 1955); and *Quatermass and the Pit* (BBC, 1958–59), as well as Hammer's adaptations of the first two of these stories, directed by Val Guest and retitled *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) and *Quatermass 2* (1957).

Newman also looks at the fourth and final Quatermass story for TV, entitled simply *Quatermass* (Thames Television, 1979), as well as touching on the three-episode docudrama for radio *The Quatermass Memoirs* (BBC Radio 3, 1996) and the 2005 remake of *The Quatermass Experiment*, which was performed live on BBC4.

Filmed a decade after the original BBC serial had been broadcast, Hammer's film version of *Quatermass And The Pit* (1967), bizarrely retitled *Five Million Years To Earth* in the US, is widely regarded by fans of the franchise as not only the best film or television Quatermass, but also as the pinnacle of Kneale's SF writing. However, with so much of his television work missing from the archives, it is impossible to know if the film adaptation of his third Quatermass story is his best work.

Newman briefly references some of these lost productions, including *The Road* (BBC, 1963) and 'The Chopper', an episode from season four of the anthology series *Out of The Unknown* (BBC, 1971). No further information is given about these missing TV plays, but this does not in any way interrupt the narrative flow of text.

He provides enough context for the reader to keep up with his encyclopædic knowledge of cult television and films. When he discusses the facial hair of the different actors to play Quatermass, however, the level of detail gets a little comical…

Released the year before Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), written with Arthur C Clarke, came out,*Quatermass and the Pit* (1967) treads similar ground. Both films explore the concept that aliens visited Earth and influenced human evolution, an idea previously conceived by HP Lovecraft. As Newman points out, however, while Kubrick and Clarke's film is visually stunning, Roy Ward Baker and Nigel Kneale do a better job in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967) of explaining to audiences what their film is about: "(The next year, almost no one would fully 'get' 2001) so it's clever storytelling to put the Professor in a position where he has to explain for the audiences as well as politicians."

With programmes like the History Channel's popular series *Ancient Aliens* and films such as Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (2012), which with its holographic apparitions and genocidal aliens arguably owes more to *Quatermass and the Pit* than it does to *Alien* (1979), the subject matter of ancient astronauts manipulating human evolution is more topical now than it was in the late 1960s, which may explain why Kneale's third Quatermass story continues to be more popular than the other three.

Newman's book has three chapters. The first gives the background to the 1950s BBC serials and director Val Guest's two big-screen adaptations for Hammer. The real substance of this informative little book, though, is the second chapter, which reads almost like the transcript of a new commentary for *Quatermass and the Pit*. Newman does a good job of writing up the events of the film in the order they transpire on the screen, and then putting these into their filmic and historical context. The final chapter deals with the fourth Quatermass story broadcast on ITV in 1979 and how *Quatermass and the Pit* has influenced other SF.

Having met and recorded a DVD commentary with Kneale for his TV play *The Stone Tape* (BBC, 1972), Newman is well positioned to evaluate what influenced the writer, who died in 2006. The guide is a page-turner. However, with barely more than 100 pages to digest, this can be a bit of a problem, especially with an RRP of £12.99.

For fans of Nigel Kneale and British SF, though, this is still a book you will want to pick up and read every time you watch the classic film it is named after.

Richard Thomas

Fortean Times Verdict
BRITISH SF FANS WILL NOT WANT TO BE WITHOUT THIS **9**

Continued from p59

these are oversights or deliberate, but of 12 volumes in Wikipedia's notice, nine are missed, as are Vicki Noble's *The Double Goddess: Women Sharing Power*, Gerhard Pollauer's *The Lost History of the Amazons* and – the mind boggles – Emanuel Kantor's *The Amazons: A Marxist Study*.

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict
MAYOR MAKES A CLEAN BREAST OF EVERYTHING **10**

Mrs Wakeman vs the Antichrist

And Other Strange-but-True Tales from American History

Robert Schneck

Tarcher Penguin 2014
Pb, 320pp, $16.95, ISBN 9781585429448
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

Robert Schneck serves up a collection of eerie, bloody and downright strange tales in the American Gothic tradition. Drawing on contemporary newspaper accounts (scrupulously footnoted), *Mrs Wakeman vs the Antichrist* features unsettling accounts of 'everyday people' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Schneck opens with the 1919 Ouija board craze, in which citizens began to receive instruction, advice and information from spirits by means of the board. A Bay Area family's obsessive use of the board spread to relatives, friends and neighbours, and led to 24-hour séances, apparent trance mediumship, spending sprees – and eventually the lunatic asylum. 'Ouijamania' established a hold on thousands, including a police officer, whose claims that he was obtaining information from the board meant that he, too, ended up in a sanatorium. In Macon, Missouri, one in five citizens was reported to have "fallen victim to the strange malady", and in El Cerrito, attempts were made to ban the board. Its use was condemned – sometimes from the pulpit – as evidence of weak-mindedness, cowardice and insanity. Elsewhere, *Mrs Wakeman vs. the Antichrist* looks at

childhood stigmata in an Oakland school in 1972; Jeane Dixon, the 'White House Psychic'; and a ferocious Bigfoot onslaught in 1924, when hairy bipeds attacked gold miners at Washington State's Mount St Helens, a tale which takes in séances, Spiritualism and apports, as well as Sasquatches.

James Moon was a farmer, blacksmith and Civil War veteran. He was also an inventor, and constructed and used (on himself) an ingenious guillotine-type device. He is one of several auto-decapitators in American history. Also featured: the mysterious 'Livingston Wizard', a West Virginia poltergeist which, around the beginning of the 19th century, developed its repertoire – stones moving invisibly, spontaneous fires, the cutting up cloth or leather in the afflicted farmhouse. It then manifested as a Voice, but unlike certain foul-mouthed invisible ranters (the Bell Witch, the Enfield Poltergeist, Gef), this Voice delivered uplifting lessons in Christian doctrine.

Sinister clowns in vans who attempt to abduct children get a look-in, as does the lesser known drinking-human-blood-for-health craze, happily confined to a very small sect in Kansas circa 1898.

One of the most disturbing chapters examines freak show impresarios, who compelled poor – and inevitably black – men to undergo dentistry and surgery that would give them fangs and horns. They were then exhibited as 'Wild Men' in travelling shows, a fairground attraction in the context of popular racist anthropology of the period, which saw black people as sub-human.

The chapter which gives the book its title tells of a bloody cult, of millenarian prophecies and a religious mania which ended in its victims being hacked, beaten or stabbed to death. This sect preceded the Manson family, Jonestown and Heaven's Gate by over 100 years, demonstrating that America's religious and spiritual life has always had a darker side.

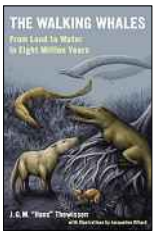
Christopher Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict

THE DARK SIDE OF AMERICA IN ALL ITS GLORIOUS DETAIL **9**

Beaking all the rules

A highly articulate study of whales suggests that they make a mockery of mammalian rules – and undermine Intelligent Design



The Walking Whales

From Land to Water in Eight Million Years

JGM 'Hans' Thewissen

University of California Press 2014

Hb, 245pp, illus, bib, ind, £24.95, ISBN 9780520277069

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.45

Dinosaurs, plesiosaurs and pterosaurs attract tourists – just try getting around the NHM's dinosaur gallery at half-term. Yet mammalian evolution is just as fascinating – just think of mammoths and other proboscidea, 'Irish elk' (*Megaloceros giganteus*) and, as Thewissen shows in this wonderful book, cetaceans such as whales, dolphins and porpoises. Apart from conveying his excitement for and expertise in cetacean evolution – Thewissen's been in the forefront of the field for decades – *The Walking Whales* underscores the intellectual vacuum underlying intelligent design and offers much for conventional biologists and cryptozoologists to ponder.

Today, about 100 species of mammal live in the sea, including seals, sea lions and manatee. *The Walking Whales* follows cetaceans' journey as they changed from a body adapted to land to one suited to the ocean over eight million years and split into about 80 extant species. Yet, until recently, advocates of intelligent design highlighted the dearth of fossilised transitional cetaceans (missing links) and dismissed DNA evidence linking whales to artiodactyla – ungulates (essentially, hoofed animals) with an even number of toes, such as hippos, cows and pigs. Today, overwhelming genetic and anatomical evidence data shows that whales evolved from artiodactyla – hippos are the closest living relatives – and the transitional forms could fill a museum gallery.

The first whale fossils – eight giant vertebræ found in a Louisiana river – came to naturalists' attention in 1832. Initially, the vertebræ were mislabelled as a giant lizard: Basilosaurus. The great anatomist Richard Owen put the record straight in 1839, noting the resemblance to whales and renaming the creature *Zeuglodon cetoides*, but under taxonomic rules the inaccurate name stuck. The extinct whales caught the popular imagination. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1884, the Reverend JG Wood attributed sightings of sea serpents in 1819–75 near Nahant, Massachusetts, to a living Basilosaurus.

Thewissen traces whales' origins to a relatively small area of northern Pakistan and western India. The first known whale, Pakicetus, emerged 49 million years ago. This wolf-sized mammal, with a prominent snout and a long powerful tail, hunted by wading in shallow streams. About a million years later, *Ambulocetus natans* ('the walking and swimming whale') spent most of the time in coastal shallows and brackish rivers, again in Pakistan. This compelling example of a missing link, about 11–12ft (3.4–3.7m) long, paddled around using its enormous hind feet. *A. natans* probably waddled around on land, rather like a sea lion.

Over time, the legs evolved into fins, they lost their external hind limbs and cetacean body shape increasingly adapted to an aquatic life. But there are throwbacks. A bottlenose dolphin called Haruka caught off Japan in 2006 has small, well-formed rear flippers, a genetic atavism of its ancestors' hind limbs. A humpback whale caught near Vancouver Island in 1919 had 4ft (1.2m) long rear appendages. Studies of atavism help uncover the molecular mechanisms that drive fœtal development and evolution more widely.

Yet we still have much to learn. Mammals in general follow a more rigid body plan than, say, reptiles, amphibians and fish. But, Thewissen notes, cetaceans "make a mockery of the mammalian rules", showing wide variations in the number of features that are usually consistent between species such as teeth, vertebræ before the sacrum (part of the pelvis) and phalanges (bones in the fingers and toes). It's almost as if cetaceans break "some very basic mammalian rules governing development".

The Walking Whales is beautifully illustrated, with clear explanations for non-biologists of, for example, isotope geochemistry. The travelogue is engaging and informative. An excellent book on a fascinating subject by an informed and articulate author. Highly recommended.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

THE PUN WRITES ITSELF: THIS IS A WHALE OF A BOOK **10**

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Comic book Big Bang

Seventy five years of marvels are lovingly assembled in this behemoth of a book telling the story of the House of Ideas

75 Years of Marvel Comics: From the Golden Age to the Silver Screen

Roy Thomas and Josh Baker

Taschen, 2014

Hb, 720pp, illus, £135

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £120

'Shared universe' is the current Hollywood buzzword as film executives scramble to replicate the unexpected critical and commercial success of Marvel Studios' 'Marvel Cinematic Universe'. While a relatively new idea in movies, the idea of a fictional shared universe has been a mainstay of superhero comics for decades; what appears to be the earliest example made its tentative appearance in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #8 (cover dated June 1940) when the Sub Mariner's latest assault on the human race is foiled by the (original) Human Torch showing up; the ensuing battle continued across the characters' strips in the following two issues. One might think that some sort of continuous line of development links this first-ever meeting of popular comic book heroes to such modern screen iterations as 2012's *The Avengers*, which brought together the characters from the four previous Marvel films; the truth, as revealed in Taschen's *75 Years of Marvel: From the Golden Age to the Silver Screen*, is rather different.

'Marvel Comics' didn't even exist as a corporate entity, let alone a recognisable brand, when *Marvel Comics* #1 went on sale in 1939; the company, founded by Martin Goodman earlier that year, was called Timely Publications and grew out of the pulp publisher's desire to move into the growth area of comic books. Timely would eventually morph into Atlas, and finally, by 1961 with the epochal appearance of *Fantastic Four* #1 and the reinvention of superheroes, into Marvel Comics.

Nearly a third of this mighty tome is devoted to the years before Marvel was Marvel and before comic books were, essentially, superhero books. The Golden Age heroes are here in all their glory – Kirby and Simon's Captain America, Bill Everett's Sub Mariner, Carl Burgos's Human Torch are each represented in well chosen covers, individual panels and some astonishing early examples of the two-page splash – but what's really fascinating is to see Goodman and faithful editor Stan Lee rethinking their approach as the first wave of superheroes waned in popularity. This meant jumping on each and every passing trend to keep the comics coming: crime comics, war comics, pre-Code horror, science fiction, detective stories and spy capers, monsters, Westerns and humour (mostly *Mad* knock-offs). All of these genres are represented by covers and interior art demonstrating that the Timely/Atlas talent pool could give EC a run for its money. There are fine examples of work by Basil Wolverton and Russ Heath, as well as early glimpses of subsequent stars like John Buscema and Gene Colan. Especially welcome is a wealth of material by the immensely talented Joe Maneely, who died at the tragically young age of 32: one fantastic rarity is a piece of original cover art from *Black Knight* #5. One can't help but wonder just what he would have gone on to achieve in what Lee dubbed "The Marvel Age of Comics", the subject of the second and longest section of this book.

It's still breathtaking to remember the sort of white-heat creative output of the Lee-Kirby-Ditko triumvirate during this period – a comics explosion that gave us the FF, Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man, Doctor Strange, The X-Men and The Avengers (with a thawed-out Cap), all in the space of about three short years. Rest assured, there are plenty of classic Kirby and Ditko moments to savour here. Equally crucial was Stan 'The Man' Lee's canny selling of Marvel Comics as a brand – a secret society that readers wanted to be a part of – from the fun-sounding (if largely fictitious) goings-on in the fabled 'bullpen' to the letters pages and editorials that created a sense of shared family around the books themselves. The visual manifestations of Lee's bombastic ballyhoo are here too, in the shape of ads, badges, membership cards, toys and other such beguiling ephemera, as well as photos of rarely glimpsed Marvel luminaries like Flo Steinberg.

The remainder of the book follows the evolution of the Marvel Universe following this comic book Big Bang, taking in everything from Steranko's op-art-pop-art masterpieces (including an extravagant four page pull-out) and Jim Starlin's trippy cosmic visions of the Seventies, to a lovely Phil Noto *Black Widow* cover from 2014. Older fans will probably be quite happy that most of the book is devoted to the period up to 1984; younger ones may think that covering the last 30 years in 50 pages gives short shrift to a wealth of more recent creators... but at least it means we can skip over much of the ghastliness that was the 1990s.

This is primarily a visual experience. There are more than 2,000 images spread over its 700-odd pages, each with a lengthy, informative caption. It's more like wandering around a museum than reading a book; while one-time Marvel scribe and editor-in-chief Roy Thomas provides the narrative essays that hold the whole thing together, they offer a satisfyingly solid rather than revelatory overview.

This magnum opus is built like a small museum too, weighing in at a Hulk-busting 8kg and standing a Giant Man-esque 15.6in tall; you'll struggle to read it in bed, and either a sturdy lectern or a large, empty table is recommended. It's a thing of beauty too, printed on heavy matte paper with sewn binding and a ribbon bookmark; it comes housed in an even more gigantic box, complete with carrying handle, in the unlikely event that should you wish to travel with it. It's certainly not cheap, but I suspect it's worth every penny.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

A MIGHTY MEMENTO OF MERRY MARVELDOM: EXCELSIOR! 9

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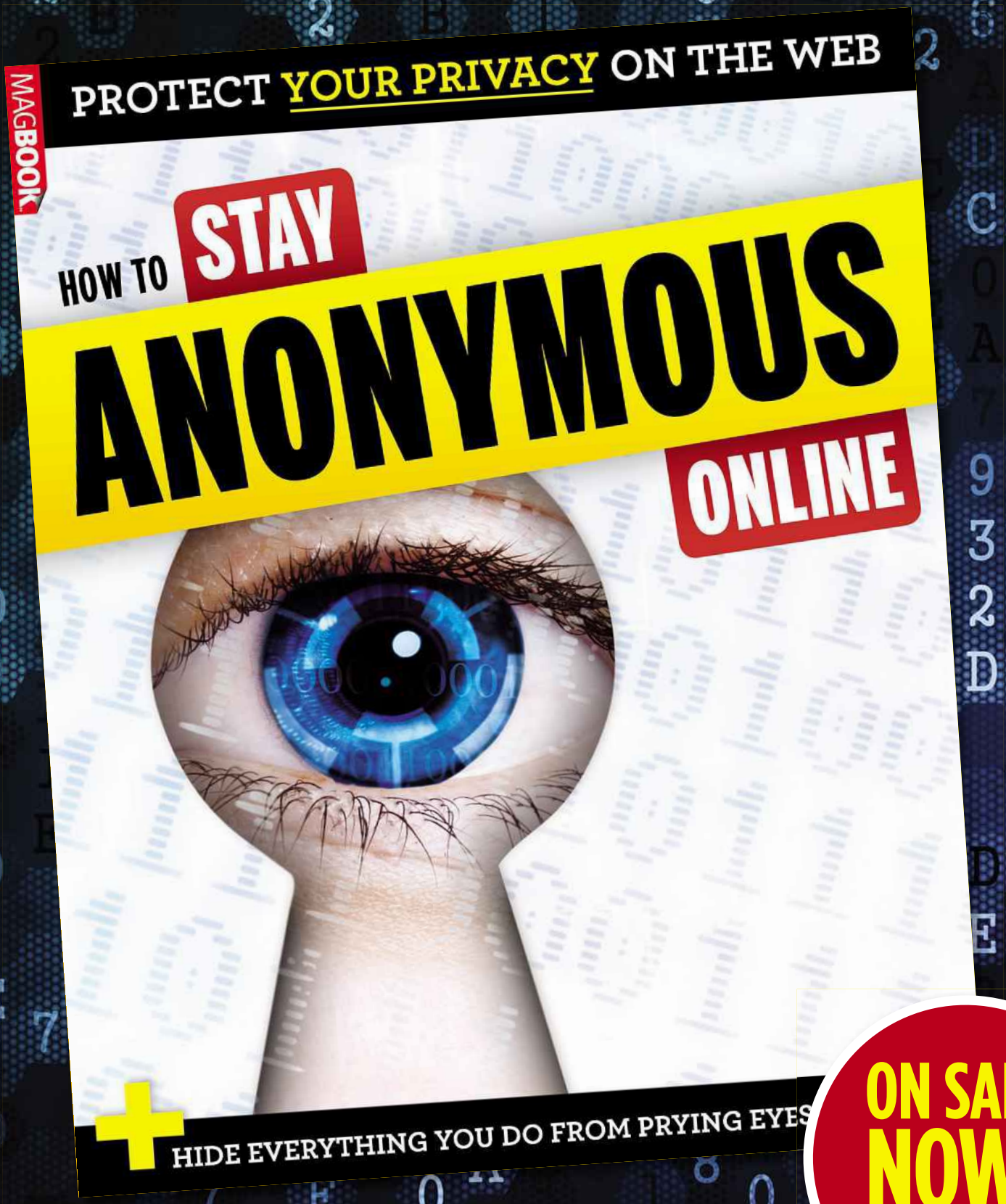

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Birdman

Dir Alejandro González Iñárritu, US 2014

On UK release

It's fair to say that Michael Keaton's career has had its ups and downs. Having turned down both *Splash* and the Harold Ramis and Bill Murray roles in *Ghostbusters*, he went on to prove the naysayers wrong with an extremely credible *Batman*. While his career since has been respectable, starring in films like *Jack Frost* have done him no favours.

In the black comedy *Birdman* (*or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance*) he plays an ex-superhero-playing actor attempting to resurrect a failing career. Was it written specifically for him? Director Alejandro González Iñárritu has said that he wanted a guy who has worn a cape, but he's also said the story is based as much on his own career as on someone like Keaton's, so who knows? (Keaton's presence does allow for some nice Batman jokes, George Clooney's chin getting a mention).

Keaton takes to playing Birdman like a duck to water (geddit?) in a role that was choreographed to the nth degree to accommodate the fluid movements of the camera making enormously long tracking shots, mostly down narrow corridors in the St James Theatre in New York. His role as Riggan Thomas, the actor who's adapting, directing and starring in a play based on Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, means that he's on screen most of the time, and every moment of it is mesmerising. No wonder Oscars are being whispered about.

The film features clever photography that weaves through the backstage and onstage dramas that unfold, as well as, momentarily, out into Times Square. Unfortunately, the use of steadicam may cause problems for those who suffer from motion sickness; my partner actually had to leave.

There are great supporting performances from the likes of Edward Norton as a younger, fitter, difficult method actor, and Emma Stone as Thomson's recovering addict daughter, as well as a storyline that lambasts Hollywood and explores the nature of fame in a social media-saturated world.

The film is not perfect. As is too often the case, a couple of the female roles aren't particularly well written, and a girl-on-girl kiss featuring Naomi Watts appears to be completely gratuitous (talking about gratuitous girl-on-girl kisses, the similarities between *Birdman* and *Black Swan* are remarkable), and Lyndsay Duncan's martini-swilling evil critic is a tad clichéd.

However, you can't really complain about a film that features stonking camera work, precision planning, a giant eagle, some excellent performances, a wonderful score (Ravel and Mahler feature, as does lots of cool-cat jazz drumming), never mind the sight of Michael Keaton in Times Square in his undies filmed with real crowds.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict

KEATON SOARS IN POSSIBLY OSCAR-WORTHY ROLE **8**

Painless

Dir Juan Carlos Medina, Spain/France/Portugal 2012

Metrodome, £9.99 DVD

In pre-Civil War Spain, a group of children is forcibly removed from their families and spirited away. The reason? They are painless: born without the ability to feel pain of any kind. Deemed too dangerous to live in normal society, they are treated as freakish monsters and incarcerated in an asylum carved into the side of a mountain.

In modern day Spain David, a surgeon (Àlex Brendemühl), awakes in hospital after a car crash to discover not only that the accident killed his pregnant wife but that he has a rare lymphatic disease which will be fatal unless he receives a bone marrow donation from one of his parents, from whom he is estranged.

And so begins the slow process of knitting these two separate narratives into one. Much in the manner of Spanish features *Pan's Labyrinth* and *The Devil's Backbone*, the film uses the Civil War as a backdrop to explore themes of guilt, fascism and, ultimately, a strange kind of reconciliation with the past. Meaty stuff then, and *Painless* certainly doesn't shy away from confronting these topics head on. Indeed, the painlessness and essential humanity of the central character Benigno is contrasted with the heartlessness and inhumanity of the fascists – first the Nationalists and then the Nazis – who exploit his condition for their own ends.

It's not wholly a horror film, although it does more than flirt with typical horror imagery and, it must be said, veers dangerously close to torture porn at times. Still, as Roman Polanski once said, if you're going to tell a story about a man who has his head cut off then you've got to show it. That's the case here: Benigno's inability to feel pain manifests itself as an inability to recognise the suffering of others, and consequently director Juan Carlos Medina is obliged to present it. It isn't wholly a mystery story either, although the mixing of timelines will be familiar to those who watched the recent *True Detective* series. One might say *Painless* is a modern fable cunningly disguised as a thriller, albeit a fable which has nothing more profound to say than "Fascism is A Bad Thing". Which it is of

course but ,nonetheless, I think the complexities of the Spanish Civil War, not to mention those of WWII, deserve more than relegation to the background of slick modern genre movies.

Another problem is that very slickness: this is one of those films in which everything in the frame looks designed to within an inch of its life. If it's not the surgeon's ultra-modern home – with its spotless glass tables – then it's the gothic dungeon in which the unfortunate children are imprisoned, all clanking doors and white-tiled treatment rooms. Add the syrupy strings on the soundtrack and you get the impression that the director is begging you to take his film seriously. Which you can, up to a point; but if you think too long about it you start to notice some quite enormous holes in the plot.

Despite its flaws, the film tells a compelling story and deserves credit for at least attempting to tackle some serious issues concerning Spain's recent past, however slight that attempt may be; and one can't deny that its intentions are honourable and its heart in the right place. It's also refreshing to see a film in which wrongdoing is not automatiacllly followed by revenge and in which a satisfying conclusion can be reached without automatically restoring the status quo.

Benigno is played by three different actors at various stages of his life, and because the character has virtually no dialogue all three have their work cut out to bring him alive, in particular the remarkable Tómas Lemarquis who plays Benigno as an adult with both a terrifying intensity and genuinely moving tenderness.

Àlex Brendemühl (who looks just like Gian Maria Volonte; never a bad thing) is given the tricky task of registering both anticipation as David slowly uncovers the truth and despair as it destroys everything he had previously believed about himself. In an explicit parallel with 20th century Spanish history, director Medina is demonstrating to us that however painful the truth may be, it must be faced if understanding is to be reached.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

SPANISH HISTORY LESSON MASQUERADING AS HORROR **6**

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

THE INCREDIBLE MELTING MAN

Dir William Sachs, US 1977
Second Sight, £15.99 (Dual Format)

Space is evil, scary and wants to kill us all. Or at least that's the case in *The Incredible Melting Man*, recently released by Arrow. Made in 1977, it's a throwback to the 1950s 'monsters-made-by-science' genre in which an astronaut called Steve West gets exposed to some slow-burn radiation while on a trip to Saturn. Back on Earth, he gradually melts, both physically and mentally, and responds as many people would if their ears kept sliding off: he kills a whole bunch of people. It's a government-funded scandal, so a scientist and army general try hard to keep a lid on it all, but the growing pile of bodies, covered in Steve's secretions, makes catching him both difficult and very slimy.

The makeup effects are by none other than Rick Baker, and look great in this surprisingly bright and clean HD print, but there's plenty more to enjoy alongside the latex and corn syrup. The script is sometimes laugh-out-loud funny, not always intentionally either, as when Steve West delivers his only big line of the movie while gazing out of a space window… "Magnificent!" he says. "You haven't seen anything, until you've seen the Sun through the rings of Saturn." But he delivers these priceless lines in a tone about as wooden and hokey as if he'd just spotted a slightly funny looking cow in a field. Oh, and I should mention the hilarious slo-mo chase of a nurse blundering through a deserted government facility only to silently crash through a glass door, while the Melting Man's smooth POV behind her looks like he must be wearing roller boots. Brilliant.

The humourous feel isn't so surprising, insofar as this was originally intended as a horror parody, until producers insisted on playing the horror straight. Still, an echo of that wink-to-camera vibe remains throughout.

For an exploitation movie with Baker on staff there's a few missed opportunities in terms of gore. You know those horror cheat shots from the 1970s where you'd see the reactions of people wincing at a dead body which the audience never get to see? There's a few too many of those. But there's still plenty of effective suspense, fun characters and a likeable hero in TV regular Burr Debenning. Personally, I loved this, not least because of the tense and surprising ending. It's the closing scene, however, that means the film concludes on a surprisingly thoughtful note. I won't spoil it here, but it cleverly points out the sheer expendability of ordinary people who become little more than fuel for the relentless quest for scientific discovery. Salient and squishy, who'd have thought it, eh?

I'd call *The Incredible Melting Man* a guilty pleasure, but then I'm not sure what there is to feel guilty about. Try it.

Fortean Times Verdict

A SEVENTIES EXPLOITATION PLEASURE, GUILTY OR NOT **7**

Outer Space

Dir various, UK 1956-1977

BFI, £19..99 (DVD)

Outer Space, the BFI'S latest DVD showcasing "three cosmic tales from the Children's Film Foundation" (CFF), demonstrates just how much children's film developed over a couple of decades.

Supersonic Saucer (1956) is, by today's standards, simply dreadful. The children, the parents, and even the villain have cut-glass accents. It's the school hols, and two girls have to stay on at their boarding school because their parents are away. With the headmaster's slightly older son (a snobby, serious youth, 14 going on 54) they discover a young alien which can take the shape of a small flying saucer, but in its own shape looks like a sock puppet – or an amœba, so the children call it Meba. The villain, the school caretaker, tips off his boss that the school safe is stuffed with silver trophies and they set up a plan to steal them.

Although Meba can communicate telepathically with the children (heaven forfend that they should be called kids) it misinterprets what they want – and though well-intentioned it lacks a moral framework. They're hungry, so it hoovers up cakes from a local bakery and brings them to the children. They're cold, so it sets fire to the room. They wish they had money, so it robs a bank of £1 million. The story deals with the comic consequences, and with the children outwitting the bumbling baddies, with plenty of Keystone Kops-type chases. The parents keep conveniently out of the way so that the children can have their adventure; the whole thing is basically Enid Blyton with an annoyingly cute alien.

The alien in *Kadoyng* (1972) is a young man with an appendage halfway between a space bopper and a willy coming out of the top of his head. He turns up in a village about to have a bypass driven through it, befriends the local children (and this time their parents), and devises a plan to outwit the construction company and the local MP. In a nice twist, he's tired and about to have his monthly sleep for a few days – so what could possibly go wrong with his plan? This one is a classic tale of good kids outwitting bad authority and, along the way, giving the local bullies a taste of their own medicine.

Meba can rewind time, usefully moving the baddies back down several flights of stairs when they're chasing the children; Kadoyng can teleport people short distances, and can get inside people's heads.

The Glitterball (1977) is by far the best of the three films, and deservedly won several awards. Its plot is surprisingly similar to *Supersonic Saucer*. An alien, this time the shape of a golfball-sized ball-bearing, crash lands on Earth in its mini-spaceship. It's hungry, and like Meba shows no change in size when vacuuming up food in amazing quantities. It's telepathic with the two teenage boys it encounters. And it outwits the villain, a particularly ineffective thief (complete with bad moustache and Cockney accent) played to comic effect by Ron Pember. What makes *The Glitterball* different (apart from better quality) is its involvement of adults; the father of one of the boys is an Air Force sergeant tracking the alien when it first appears, then as it moves around.

These films were all created on a shoestring by the Children's Film Foundation, set up in 1951 to produce films for Saturday mornings in the cinemas. They attracted some decent names, all voluntarily working at minimum rates: the producer of *Supersonic Saucer* was Frank Wells, son of HG; comic actors Jack Haig and Bill Owen appear in *Kadoyng*; Barry Jackson, the sergeant in *The Glitterball*, also appeared in *Doctor Who*, *Adam Adamant*, *The New Avengers*, *Doomwatch* and more; the special effects in *The Glitterball* were by Brian Johnson, who worked on *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Space: 1999*.

The CFF produced films for over 30 years, up to the early 1980s. Clearly they reflected their times, particularly in the style of acting; but as children's TV developed through the 60s, 70s and 80s (in the process causing the demise of the CFF), so did CFF films; S*upersonic Saucer* might make us wince today, but *The Glitterball* is the equal of anything on the small screen.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

INSTRUCTIVE HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S SF FILMS **8**

SHORTS

UNEARTHLY STRANGER

Network, £9.99 (DVD)

This 1964 sci-fi film feels small, but in a good way. It's set largely in a space research centre where an irritable scientist researching 'thought travel' sees his fellow astrophysicists dying of weird brain implosions. He starts wondering if his beautiful new wife might have something to do with it. After all, she never blinks and sleeps with her eyes wide open (a creepy moment). There are no real extras on the disc, but the picture quality is good and the film features what must be the longest chloroforming sequence in cinema history. An interesting, off-beat SF thriller with more than a few nods to Seigel's classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. **Rev PL** 7/10

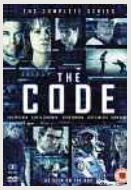
BLOODSHOT

Signature Entertainment, £9.99 (DVD)

Danny Dyer has developed the reputation of being a Kitemark for low quality film-making. I'm sorry to say that *Bloodshot* will only cement that status. Dyer plays Philip, a maker of prosthetics for gory horror films who one night meets a confused young woman (Zoe Grisedale) in the park. After allowing her to spend the night on his sofa they strike up a tentative relationship, but he begins to suspect she's not what she seems. At this point we're about 10 minutes in, and that's where the problems start. The writing is dreadful. Does Dyer, or his agent for that matter, actually read this stuff before signing up? To what extent the script is responsible for the appalling performances I can't be certain, but Dyer and Keith Allen appear to have just two modes: on or off. There's no light or shade, no subtlety or nuance; which suggests they didn't get much in the way of direction. There's no clarity either: the plot, such as is it, staggers drunkenly from scene to scene with apparently no idea of where it's heading. One would normally point the finger of blame at either the writer or the director: on *Bloodshot* it will come as no great surprise to learn that Raoul Girard is both. And he also produced the film. Therein, perhaps, lies the problem: there was no-one to tell him it was going tits up. **DK** 2/10

THE CODE

Arrow, £19.99 (DVD)



The Code aired in BBC4's usual slot for 'Nordic noir'. This six-part Australian political thriller offers the usual mix of corruption, rogue politicos and big issues, but doesn't require subtitles and is set against the sunnier backdrop of Canberra and the outback. Despite the change in setting, the mix is standard stuff: investigating a tip-off about a crash in the outback that killed a teenager, a crusading journalist and his autistic computer hacker brother find themselves caught up in a conspiracy that reeks more of cock-up than corruption. Tossed into the mix are Australia's ruthless security services, black ops specialists, high-level politicians, Iranian immigrants, military secret thieves and North Korean meddlers. It's nicely put together, but there's nothing here we've not seen before. In fact, occasionally *The Code* seems to be straining to echo the 1985 classic *Edge of Darkness*, but lacks that show's weird fortean edge. Rising star Ashley Zukerman plays the confused hacker, while *Xena's* Lucy Lawless appears in a supporting role. **Brian J Robb** 6/10

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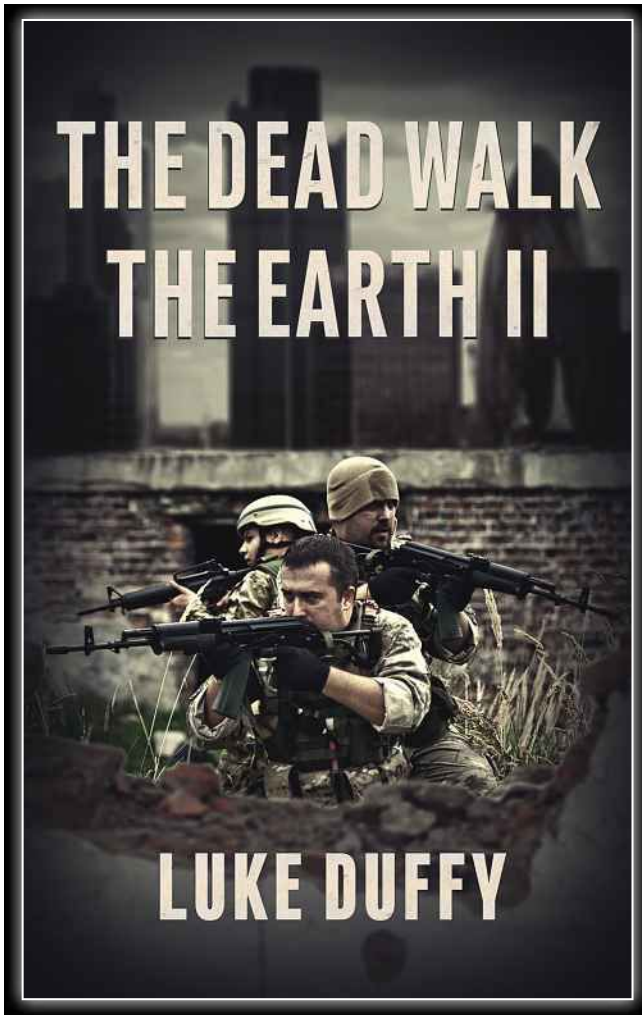

The mainland is lost, conquered by the armies of walking dead that now roam the earth, consuming all in their path as they spread like a black plague through the wasteland that had once been civilisation. As the remains of the human race retreat to the islands, clinging to them like life rafts in an ocean of terror, the ravenous monsters, the evil shadows of humanity, become the dominant species on the planet.
Disease, famine, and death begin to spread through the cramped refugee camps, threatening the continued existence of the living and forcing the remnants of the government and armed forces to begin an offensive that would recapture the ground that they have lost to the infected hordes. The survivors of the team, finding themselves placed at the spearhead of the great counterstrike, are given a special mission that would help tip the scales against their rotting enemy. Now they must fight for the entire world.

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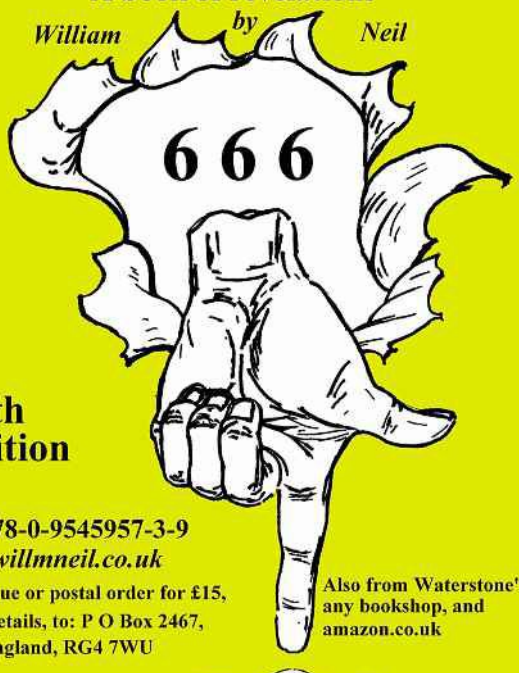

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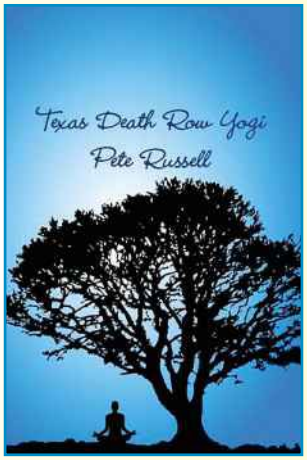

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Dear FT...

letters

Strange music

Chris Woodyard's feature on "The Music of Fairyland" [**FT321:46-49**] made me wonder if anomalous music has ever been recorded. There is an unconvincing section on the *Ghost Orchid* EVP CD devoted to "Singing Voices"; they sound to me like broken radio signals of opera or Lieder. Blind British UFO researcher Philip Rodgers recorded a children's choir, strange tremolos and short musical figures by placing a microphone on his bedroom windowsill (Janet & Colin Bord, *Life Beyond Planet Earth?*, 1992, p.121), although this could have been earthly ambient noise. In 1977, in Monkstown, Dublin, a voice believed locally to be that of deceased landowner Sir Valentine Grace was taped at night singing "Danny Boy" (Janet & Colin Bord, *Modern Mysteries of the World*, 1989, p.184f). The chances of hearing someone in a body of flesh ventilating that melody in Ireland after dark must be very high, but the voice was louder and clearer during the Full Moon: according to Konstantin Raudive, this "seems to enhance contact" (*Breakthrough*, 1971, p.137).

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Hoax unproven

I am not as convinced as Dr David Clarke and Andy Roberts that the McMinnville UFO photographs are a hoax [**FT321:28**]. My reasons for saying this are threefold. Firstly, the work of IPACO, on which the Flyingsaucery team's assertion largely relies, has been criticised by others for allowing their calculations and subsequent conclusions to flow too readily in directions that suited their sceptical agenda. Secondly, the character of the photographer, Paul Trent, has been the subject of a great deal of scrutiny over the years and, apart from some doubt over exactly when the photos were taken, nothing else that might cast doubt on his integrity has emerged. The Trents made no money from the photographs, were not the ones to first bring them to public attention, and insisted until their deaths that it was not a hoax. Less flatteringly, they have also been described as too unimaginative to have perpetrated such a deception. It is easy to be cynical, but some people occasionally do tell the truth. Finally, having studied the photograph closely, I have to say that the angle of the saucer does seem to be a difficult one to achieve when suspending a small but nevertheless dense object (a car mirror has been mooted) from a very slender thread. Just try it yourself – the object tends to turn on its side very easily. And I would also have expected a greater degree of sagging from the overhead wire (visible in the photograph in *Fortean Times*), if that indeed was where the object was suspended from, as suggested in the article. Moreover, having looked at the high resolution Walter photographs on line, I failed to see the thread that the Flyingsaucery team said had been identified. Sceptic's pareidolia perhaps? On that basis, although I admit that there will always be doubt about exactly what Paul Trent managed to capture on film, I do think that it is very far from being "case closed".

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Simulacra corner

This photograph of a galloping horse in a glass of water was sent in by Duncan Kaiser.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

Honey bees

The supposed "truth" that honeybees die after stinging [**FT320:23**] is contradicted by anecdotal evidence: a Scout master, supported by his colleagues, attested that it's only the physical act of brushing the honeybee away that rips it apart with its stinger anchored. If you can tough it out, the bee will edge around in a circular motion until free and buzz off – presumably to sting you again.

Adam Bourne
Cheshire

Prussian wildmen

I love the idea that woodwoses might be a cryptic Anglo-Saxon in-joke, in response to the Norman invasion ["Green men", **FT320:72**]. On the same page, Martin Jenkins points out that woodwoses turn up as supporters in the coats of arms of several north German states, and asks: "Is there some connection between Suffolk and north Germany in the late Middle Ages? I have not been able to find one."

In fact, there is a very good connection: the Hanse merchants. The Hanseatic League was originally a self-help organisation of merchants and ship-owners that grew into one of the most powerful north European trade organisations between the late 13th and early 16th centuries. Some of their main German ports were Lübeck, Bremen, Hamburg and Danzig. The later port was then in Prussia, gateway to the vast, dark forests of central Europe, and is now known as Gdansk, in Poland.

Polish timber was in great demand for shipbuilding for centuries, so it is highly likely that myths and legends about the inhabitants of the great forests would find their way into the seaports of East Anglia – such as Ipswich, Yarmouth, and King's Lynn – and then gradually work

letters

DET MÅ SKJE FØR NOEN STÅR OPP!
DET BLIR INGENTING IGJEN TIL Å BEVISE AT JEG, NÅ - LAGET JUKSEBILDER FOR Å BLI BERØMT OG TJENE PENGER.
JEG GJØR DET ALDRI MER!

Fortean Donald Duck

I think my earliest fortean influence was Donald Duck. I was a regular reader of DD since I was three (even if I couldn't always make sense of what I read). As my aunt used to buy the weekly magazine, I probably encountered it even earlier. I still have most of my old DD mags, and there's a strong streak of forteana running through them. A quick survey throws up the following:

Flying saucers and aliens / Abominable Snowmen, and other related monsters / sea serpents and lake monsters, including Nessie / dragons and present-day dinosaurs / witches and wizards / ghosts / reincarnation / levitation / hypnosis, mind control, telepathy / crystal balls and other forms of remote viewing / precognition / magic, in several different guises / Gladstone Gander's fabulous luck, Scrooge McDuck's lucky dime / fairytale characters (Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, giants, fairies) / Santa Claus, elves and flying reindeer / magic lamps and djinn / the *Flying Dutchman* / the Indian Rope Trick / and lost cities.

Many science fiction themes are also represented: space travel / time travel / mad inventors (Gyro Gearloose etc) / sentient robots, intelligent machines / and rays of different types. A Mickey Mouse story even borrows heavily from Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* scare.

Hallowe'en is often featured (naturally enough). In one Hallowe'en story, a real witch is tangled up with Gyro Gearloose on a mechanical broomstick – thus bringing together the three planes of dressing-up, magic and science fiction. Interestingly, the fortean themes are sometimes presented as hoaxes (*fake* abominable snowmen and Nessies, for example). At other times, they are presented as 'real'. This is typical of the ad-hoc nature of the cartoon universe – Donald may be an incompetent bungler in one story, and a superb craftsman in the next. It is also interesting to note which fortean themes are *not* represented. I cannot remember ever reading about poltergeists – too disturbing, maybe, or too abstract?

Death is a near-absolute taboo in the stories, so SHC, zombies, vampires, revenants and such are out (even if there has been at least one reincarnation story). Religion is also non-existent, so anything touching on this is avoided – angels, for example. Ghosts are OK, but ghosts interpreted as disembodied souls are out. (We are treading a fine line here, but Disney obviously found a formula that worked. Compare *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and suchlike, which seem to employ the same metaphysics.) The fortean themes are (almost) never presented in a sinister or scary way. After all, it's funny animal stories for children, so the ghoulishness of the horror comics never intrudes. (This has probably nothing to do with the Comics Code, since Disney's universe was established well before 1954.)

Besides Donald Duck, the other important influence in my formative years was Daffy Duck. This comic also had many fortean references, but the flavour was different, just as its humour was appreciably more surrealistic. Among other things, magic was often taken for granted in the stories. The two pictures reproduced here are scanned from the 28 October and 11 November 1959 issues. The first shows a gangster disguised as King Neptune's Revenant (sic). This picture scared my five-year-old self so badly that I didn't dare look at it for years. The second is rather more interesting, as it shows Elmer Fudd's cousin Rory McFudd with an inflatable rubber Nessie. This is an intriguing story on many levels, firstly because it unbelievably mixes a *real* fairy, with real magical powers, with a *fake* Nessie. Secondly, the basis of the plot is that Rory McFudd made the Rubber Nessie "to take faked photographs and get rich and famous". (In the picture, he is towing it away to destroy the evidence.) This implies that the idea of faking Nessie photos must have been a well-known meme in the US before 1959.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

their way into the hinterland.

Of course, this doesn't explain why woodwoses were not carved in churches in the Netherlands, Denmark, or Sweden, but it does provide the link that Mr Jenkins is looking for.

Dana S Adler
Chatham, Kent

OBE? OMG!

Out-of-body experiences (OBEs), the objective reality of which was doubted by Martin Stubbs [**FT318:74**] were the subject of your report "Out-of-body on demand" (**FT313:12**, not **FT312:12** as the cross reference stated). The subject of OBEs belongs under the broader heading of consciousness, the endless debates on which (including these very words) need not be taken seriously, given that no one has got very far towards understanding more than bits and pieces of this highly subjective subject. The problematic nature of trying to figure out what consciousness is or how it works is shown by two comments, one ancient, the other modern. The first is found in the Hindu Vedas: "How can the knower be known?" The second one goes: "If the brain were so simple we could understand it, we'd be so simple we couldn't." If science can understand consciousness in materialistic or rationalistic terms – thereby eliminating God, soul or spirit – this wipes out all but the provisional, highly ephemeral personal reality of those who have experienced OBEs. For if the Cosmos can promise nothing better than oblivion, this renders all human existence infinitesimal by comparison with an infinity of time before and after. So in that case, who would want to spend their fleeting moments in the Sun in a doomed attempt to demonstrate a virtual negative: that consciousness is merely an "emergent property", whose efforts to justify itself by positing a Deity cannot alter a truth which that entity, ironically, can never experience – that the idea of Death as a door between worlds is merely a comforting fantasy?

Yet however marvellous research keeps on finding the brain to be, it tells us nothing about personal consciousness, let alone spiritual realms, because obviously consciousness, whether a res ipsa, emergent property or both – God or no God, as it were – requires a wondrous mechanism in order to manifest!

Finally, my own (apparent) OBE followed or concluded a dream rivalling for weirdness anything described in Whitley Strieber's (purportedly) non-fiction books about "the visitors". Whatever the true reality of this experience may have been, perhaps a dream ending as a waking dream, it seemed to conclude with my mind or non-corporeal self returning to the body, with a sense of gentle impact. Similar stories from others are legion. In sum, the nature of awareness in all its forms, including dreams, OBEs, etc. can be argued forever, but anything more than fragments – such as different roles played by various parts of the brain – of any full, comprehensive truth seems likely to remain well beyond any conceivable horizon.

Richard Porter
Denver, Colorado

Sand sliding

Your archæology report "Moving pyramid stones" [**FT319:16**] described an experiment in which heavy weights were pulled on sleds across wet sand, allowing the sleds to glide easily, as if this were a new discovery. I remember watching a TV documentary on this same subject over a decade ago. A team of archæologists went to Giza, and attempted to build a pyramid (roughly 12ft/3.7m square, I think). They used the exact same technique of wetting the sand and even the local labourers were surprised when heavy lumps of stone glided easily over its surface. Does anyone remember the documentary in question?

Julian Hadley
By email

Discrete instants

Regarding Alan Lewis's comments [**FT317:70**] on Jenny Randles's "Reality Blinks" [**FT315:27**]: yes, a small fly landing on the smudge *might* have caused the sudden and simultaneous attention of Ms Randles and her cat – but it is odd how desperately some people need to account for anomalous events with mundane explanations, however unlikely these are. I say *some*, because – with the exception of the 'celebrity atheists' like Richard Dawkins – most scientists I have met, or am aware of, are not so certain. I have studied quantum field theory and remain gobsmacked at how weird the world is.

Professor Meinard Kuhlmann's paper "What is Real" (*Scientific American*, August 2013) gives a good idea of just how little we know.

It seems that, having had the hackneyed superstition that everything in existence can be explained with 'science' pounded into them their whole lives, people need to find mundane explanations in order to preserve their sanity, some even sneering at those with the wisdom to have open minds.

As regards "Reality Blinks", there is much scientific argument that time does not flow in the way we generally accept, but is a sequence of discrete instants. Papers to this effect often appear in the pages of *New Scientist* and *Scientific American*.

Julian Barbour (visiting professor of physics at Oxford) even argues in his book *The End of Time* that time does not have an objective existence, but is a function of consciousness, what we experience as the passing of time being the sequential experience of portions of a vast and timeless landscape, consisting of an infinity of different configurations of the Universe. The successive configurations in each experienced moment hardly changes, and occurs so fast that we necessarily believe in time, and that its flow must be orderly. One second of seeming time arguably contains around 10^{44} such instants.

Some of those working on quantum gravity have argued that time may be quantised – by a figure derived from G (Newton's constant of gravity), h (Planck's constant) and c (the velocity of light) – as around 10^{-44} seconds. In reality, however, continuity is an illusion, just as the continuity in films is an illusion, since it is really many discrete and utterly independent pictures being presented per second. The past sequentially leads to the present, but doesn't create or cause it.

To be fair, while agreeing with the above, Professor Barbour does *not* go further and endorse the belief – of some, including myself – that each experienced moment does not *depend* upon the previous one, despite the deepest level of the subconscious mind being convinced it does.

"I hear you don't like letting people go"

JORODO

Reality conforms to its description, so those who believe in nothing beyond the ordinary, predictable, boring, repetitious, measurable, material, mechanical, mundane, miserable and mistaken – will find their world agrees, by always providing *them* with strong evidence for their views. But there is a more exciting choice.

Daring to go a little more way out, Bashar (an entity allegedly channelled by Darryl Anka) said in one of his seminars: "When you allow that the world is being recreated at every instant, when you comprehend increasing degrees of difference between one reality moment and the next, rather than ones that are so similar to each other that you cannot tell that anything has changed, when you create that high degree of momentary difference, your physical reality will start to become unglued. It will start to dissolve. Space and time will become flexible and slippery. Your life will turn into what it really is – a wonderful fairy tale."

If you were wishing to fraudulently present yourself as a channeller of some non-physical entity, it is very unlikely that you would come up with ideas as crazy to explain the nature of time as those presented by Bashar. In fact, they are in astonishing agreement with what Professor Barbour is proposing, particularly regarding the true nature of instants of time. Great fun!

Rob Solomon
Southwick, West Sussex

Not a crinoline

Sarah Ann Henley attempted suicide by jumping off Clifton Suspension Bridge in 1885 [**FT321:76-77**], so the suggestion in William Heasall's "laborious verse" that she had been saved by her crinoline acting as a parachute is probably mistaken. Crinolines had been out of fashion for a good 15 years by then, so it seems extremely unlikely that a 22-year-old barmaid would have been wearing one!

Janet Wilson
By email

RIGHT: This is probably the sort of dress Miss Henley would have been wearing.

it happened to me...

First-hand accounts of goings-on from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

White enigma

I have been recording glow-worms on Little Baddow Heath in central Essex for over a decade. The Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve is quite dense ancient woodland intersected by bridleways with a small area of open heathland nestled in the middle. On 11 July 2014 I was accompanied by Laura Jane Weir and we were searching the open heathland for glow-worms when we both noticed a white figure – about 50m (55 yards) distant as determined from a follow-up daytime site visit – on the edge of the heathland at around 10.30pm. As we had no torch (artificial light makes seeing glow-worms more difficult), our eyes had been accustomed to the dim light for about 40 minutes and making colours out was now almost impossible. At first we thought it was a deer (either a fallow or muntjac) due to its light colour.

Curious, we moved closer to the white figure, which appeared to correspondingly move towards us, making no discernible sound. As we got closer it became clear that it was a white, cloudlike shape, with an indistinct form. We stopped around 5m (16ft) from the figure and noticed that it was constantly changing shape, but no features were clear, although it was not transparent. It was pitch dark, with a little natural light on the open heathland, and we had no torch to illuminate the figure, which we could see was about a 1m (3.3ft) in height. The figure's features were indistinct with no recognisable attributes of human or animal form. Concerned and distinctly unnerved, we left the heathland and searched other parts of the woodland for glow-worms. We came back at around 10.45pm to see if the figure was still there but it had disappeared.

There are possible natural causes behind the sighting. One possible explanation is that the figure was just the misperception of a white birch tree stump observed in poor light leading to the perception that the tree stump moved when in reality we were moving towards it. A visit to the site at 3.30pm on 17 July 2014 found a one-metre-high birch

"We got closer, and it became clear that it was a cloud-like shape, with an indistinct form"

stump (pictured above) in the approximate location of the sighting. The tree stump had a 1.5m (5ft) high birch tree growing in front of it and the leaves were swaying in the wind, which at night could have been misperceived as a moving figure set against the backdrop of the dull white stump. The stump and associated birch sapling remain the most likely natural cause of the sighting. However, we will never definitely know what we saw that night.

Dr Tim Gardiner
By email

Fey encounters

I have intended to write to you for ages concerning the 'world of faery'. Some years ago I had two rather peculiar 'encounters' in the same week. The first was as I was waiting at a busy pedestrian crossing on our local High Street in my lunch hour. This crossing is controlled by traffic lights, so I pressed the button and duly waited for the green light. As I stood there, a very small icy cold hand slipped into mine. I jumped and looked to my left to see I was holding the hand of a very small, very old, wrinkled but otherwise unremarkable sprightly old lady. I would say she was about the size of a child of eight or nine. She asked if I would cross her over the road and, rather surprised, I said that of course I would. She grasped my hand very hard and in some way I was aware of a sharp sweetness about her. The lights changed, the traffic stopped, and we crossed the road. As we got to the other side I asked her where she was headed, and could I help her further. She replied that she "was not going to the same place as me", let go of my hand and promptly vanished! That is to say she let go of my hand as I turned my head towards the obvious place I thought she'd be going – the local supermarket, where I was headed – and when I turned back to her, nothing! No trace she had ever existed. She had just evaporated in an ordinary street with a few people in it and nowhere else to go.

Later that week, I was walking down a road on a slight hill. Coming towards me I again saw a rather elderly lady, this time of normal size. She walked briskly towards me, slowed down and declared "Fancy meeting you again! Twice in one week." I had never seen her in my life before. I was sure of this as she had only one eye. The sightless eye appeared sunken, permanently closed as if in a perpetual wink. I apologised and said she must be mistaken. To which she responded, somewhat randomly: "The wind must have been in the wrong direction", and marched off up the hill. This time I didn't look round to see her vanish but rapidly made my way down the hill.

Random oddness for which I have no explanation. A side step into another dimension? The two encounters, though bearing little resemblance to each other, I have mentally filed away under the heading of Faery Folk, though I have little reason to label them as such. The only word that seems to cover them both is 'fey'.

Mary Worrall
By email

Bird-headed

A strange event happened to my cousin and me in the late summer of 1997, when I lived in southern New Hampshire. I remember this incident as if it were yesterday and so does my cousin, both of us now in our early thirties. We were on a bicycle trip to visit our grandparents in the town of Merrimack. At the time I was living in Nashua and my cousin lived in the smaller town of Hudson. Halfway to our destination, we decided to walk along the side of a nearby railroad track for a while just to get off of the road for a bit and have some time to talk.

Well, we were both scanning the gravel, watching out for anything that might pop the tyres on our bikes, when from my right, and in front of my cousin who was also on the right side of the tracks, was a small figure, a bit larger than an average toy action figure or doll. It literally looked like a tiny person, but dressed in some type of rough brown clothing. Besides its size, the weirdest aspect of the thing was its head: it looked like a bird, though I couldn't say what type. The thing ran from the right, over the tracks and to my left into some bushes. This was near an abandoned factory – I have no clue what had been manufactured there.

We both stopped and stared at the bush where the little person/thing ran into and then we looked at each other, confused and a bit spooked. Neither of us had taken any mind-altering drugs. Naturally, we tried to dismiss the thing as an actual bird, but we both saw the same details. I thought perhaps it was wearing a mask of a bird and my cousin insisted that it had the actual head of a bird on a humanoid body. That was the only difference in how we saw the thing.

Honestly, if it were possible to testify

to this sighting in a court of law, I would, but there is no evidence beyond our eyewitness account. How could two people hallucinate the same thing? Could there have been fumes of some kind coming from the abandoned building, yet undetected by our senses? The best, though somewhat silly, description of this thing is that it was a lot like one of the "brownies" from the film *Willow*. That was the one and only time such a thing happened and I don't talk about it often for fear of sounding crazy.

Jason Hirth
New England

Invisible cats

I was interested in the letter from Diana Yoshino [**FT311:77**] in which she describes the sensation that an invisible cat had jumped onto her bed. One of the (regrettably) few weird moments I have personally experienced occurred one night in my own bedroom in my parents' house, where I distinctly felt a large animal, which I interpreted as something bigger than a household moggie, land on the end of my bed and stalk its way up towards my pillow. As it came close to my face I reached out and closed my hand round its front leg, which felt perfectly palpable and real, and with my other hand turned on the bedside lamp. Instantly all sensation of its paw in my hand or its pressure on the bed vanished and, needless to say, there was nothing there. I was shaken, but even at the time – I was in my teens – I interpreted this as relating to that twilight state between sleep and waking rather than anything overtly supernatural. Not long afterwards I was reading J Sheridan Le Fanu's vampire novella *Carmilla*, and was certainly struck by the passage in which the young heroine describes what she takes to be a nightmare:

"But I was equally conscious of being in my room, and lying in bed, precisely as I actually was. I saw, or fancied I saw, the room and its furniture just as I had seen it last, except that it was very dark, and I saw something moving round the foot of the bed, which at first I could not accurately distinguish. But I soon saw that it was a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat. It appeared to me about four

or five feet [1.2-1.5m] long for it measured fully the length of the hearthrug as it passed over it; and it continued to-ing and fro-ing with the lithe, sinister restlessness of a beast in a cage. I could not cry out, although as you may suppose, I was terrified. Its pace was growing faster, and the room rapidly darker and darker, and at length so dark that I could no longer see anything of it but its eyes. I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast. I waked with a scream. The room was lighted by the candle that burnt there all through the night, and I saw a female figure standing at the foot of the bed, a little at the right side. It was in a dark loose dress, and its hair was down and covered its shoulders. A block of stone could not have been more still. There was not the slightest stir of respiration. As I stared at it, the figure appeared to have changed its place, and was now nearer the door; then, close to it, the door opened, and it passed out."

As vampire imagery this (published in 1872) was unusual, but the sensation of something springing onto the bed is not. I often lecture on Gothic topics to wonderfully communicative adult audiences, and when discussions of real-life experiences ensue this perception of something arriving unseen on one's bed regularly gets mentioned. Sometimes it is perceived as an animal, usually a cat, but the other variant is feeling that a person has sat down on the side or end of the bed. There is never anything visible, but accounts vary from those which simply describe the physical sensation on the bed to those where the narrator 'senses' things about who/whatever has interrupted their sleep, sometimes speculating a detailed story-line ("I think that someone was ill in this room and the doctor would come and sit on the end of the bed…") During the experience the participant considers themselves to be awake, sometimes (as in my own case) to have actually been awakened by the unexpected pressure on the bed. The realisation that there is nothing to be seen, however, is usually interpreted as waking up from what was, in fact, a nightmare on the edge of sleep rather than a waking occurrence. I suspect Le Fanu knew of this not-uncommon form of hypnagogic/hypnopompic experience, and wove some of its features into what, in *Carmilla*, is a vampire attack upon a sleeping young woman. Alas, none of the accounts I have been given ended up with Ingrid Pitt in a diaphanous nightie standing at the end of the bed!

Gail-Nina Anderson
Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Distinctive cry

Garrick Alder's letter on phantom miaows [**FT320:73**] is very interesting. Shortly after I moved away from home – I was then living with my mother – the neighbour's cat died. He was a lovely, friendly puss who would always be waiting for me when I came back from work each evening. I remember him looking around in a confused/perplexed way as I loaded my stuff into the car and moved out. Within a few weeks he unexpectedly died during a minor operation at the vet. I often remarked that he died of a broken heart! Anyway, not long after that I started to hear him crying outside my second floor bedroom window at night. He had a very distinctive cry, so there was no possibility that it was another cat. It went on from time to time – it wasn't all that frequent – for a few weeks.

My theory is that apart from the obvious – that it was his ghost making the noise – it could be due to the heightened senses that came with the move. I was in a strange, new place. Perhaps this was coupled with the emotional element – the loss of a beloved pet? In other words, both elements were needed to put me on edge enough to hear the noise, whether it was real or merely my imagination. Incidentally, I lived alone, and was on my own every time I heard it. It was very weird.

I sometimes think of the cry of the banshee – the fell voice on the wind that foretells the impending death of a family member, which is usually unexpected. Perhaps something is present before and after death for a time, a bit like the smell of tobacco smoke in a room after a smoker has departed. It then naturally dissipates. If we are sensitive enough we can connect with it before it goes. Then again, I like to think that he visited me to say goodbye before he went to the rat-infested barn (or comfy duvet) in the sky!

Nick Smith
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

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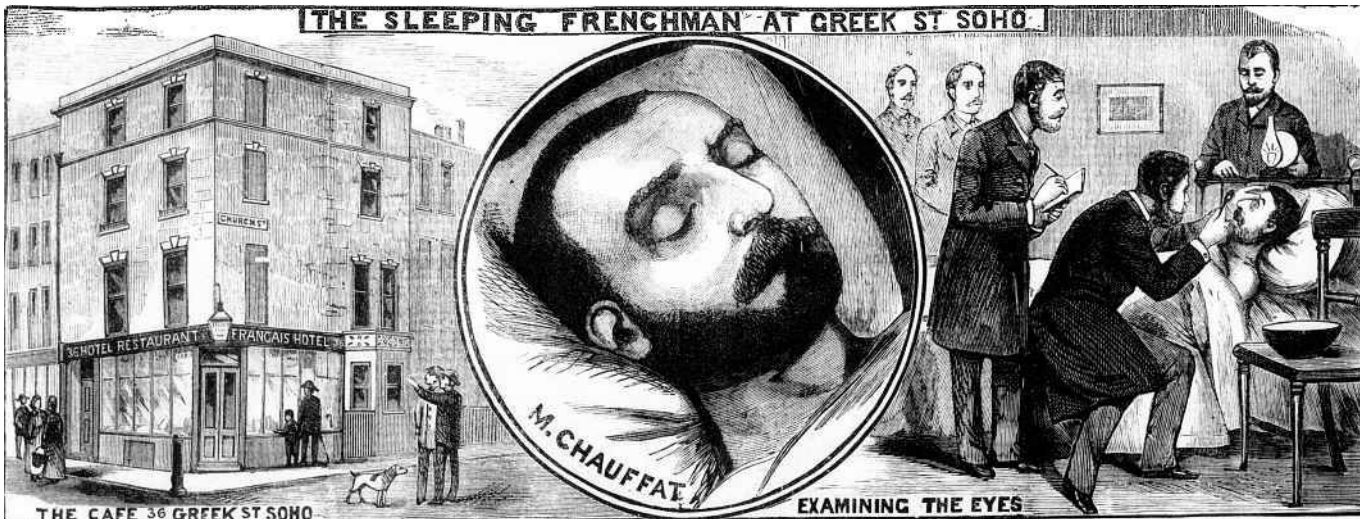
JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

36. THE SLEEPING FRENCHMAN OF SOHO

In March 1887, a Frenchman named Monsieur Chauffat came to stay at the Hotel Français at No. 36 Greek Street, Soho. A native of Annecy, Haute Savoie, Chauffat was a commercial traveller employed by a French wine merchant and had been to London before. Albeit a middle-aged man, M Chauffat was keen to go partying in the Metropolis. Along with two other hotel guests, he went to a club in Rathbone Place, and then to the Hotel de Paris in Leicester Square. The others had had enough, but 'party animal' Chauffat went on to a house (or perhaps a brothel) in Tottenham Court Road, riding in a cab along with two 'ladies' who had invited him there. Inside the house, the drunken Frenchman was robbed of £32 and a gold watch, and then unceremoniously kicked out of the premises.

Several people saw the dazed Chauffat bumbling around in Tottenham Court Road, including the cabman who had driven him there. But when the Frenchman appealed to him for help, the cab driver just grimaced and drove away in his vehicle. Clearly, he had been in cahoots with the two deceitful 'ladies' who had decoyed Chauffat to the house of ill-repute. Since Chauffat could not speak a word of English, and since he did not know where to find the Hotel Français, he was in immediate danger of further misadventures. Fortunately, a kind lady rescued him and took him back to the hotel in a cab. Too drunk (and perhaps also ashamed) to explain what had happened, Chauffat just lurched up to his bedroom.

But strangely, this odd Frenchman did not get out of bed again. At first, M Bougeret the hotel-keeper thought that he was just 'sleeping it off', but after a few days, Dr Jean Keser from the French Hospital was called in. Dr Keser found his patient in a state of deep lethargy, and it proved impossible to rouse him by shouts, pinches, or shining a strong light into his eyes. Chauffat had lost one of his arms in active service in the Franco-Prussian War, but otherwise his physical health seemed quite good. He did not appear drunk or drugged. The inner pocket of his coat contained a card stating that he was under treatment at the famous Salpetrière Hospital in Paris for a dangerous form of



ABOVE: The hotel at 36 Greek Street, a portrait of Monsieur Chauffat, and the doctors examining the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 9 April 1887. **TOP**: Nightlife in Leicester Square, from an old postcard.

STRATED NEWS
EKLY RECORD

catalepsy. If he was found in a state of nervous collapse or profound sleep, he should immediately be returned there.

The problem was: who would pay for the transportation of this lethargic patient back to the Paris hospital? The Tottenham Court Road robbers had done a thorough job, leaving the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho entirely penniless. Dr Keser worried about his fees, and M Bougeret was fearful that his soporific countryman might not be able to pay his hotel bill.

Dr Keser spread the word about his singular patient in London's medical world, and on 30 March, Sir William MacCormac, Dr Beevor and Mr Brudenell Carter went with him to the Hotel Français, where M Chauffat was fast asleep in the top floor front room. The doctors found the lifeless figure in the bed very interesting, and tried various experiments to try to stimulate his nervous system. They found it curious that if the Frenchman's arm was raised, it remained in an upright position until pushed down again. When his large bushy moustache was pulled, he grimaced with pain. M Chauffat was unable to move his extremities voluntarily, or to take any nourishment. The doctors pronounced his case one of the most extraordinary ever seen in Britain.

There was not a lot of interesting news in March and April 1887, and the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho soon became a newspaper celebrity. The *Standard* and other newspapers published daily reports about his condition. On 1 April, another party of medical men went to see Chauffat, and his case was discussed in a leading article in the *Lancet*. After a week in bed, the Frenchman was getting seriously hungry, and he drank *boullion* and brandy with avidity, even being able to masticate some bread. A young doctor suggested that itching-powder should be applied, or that some noxious substance should be mixed with the patient's soup, but Dr Keser did not allow such indignities to his famous patient. When "Ouvrez les yeux!" was shouted into the Frenchman's ear, his eyelids twitched. The celebrated Dr Charcot had not answered a letter appealing for help, and both Dr Keser and M Bougeret were becoming increasingly fearful that their bills would not be paid. Moreover, inquiries had revealed that Chauffat had no wealthy *tante d'heritance* to pay his medical bills; his parents were both dead, and his four sisters in a feeble state of health themselves. On 7 April, Dr Keser made an appeal in the *Morning Post*, asking generous Londoners for contributions to the Chauffat Relief Fund, intended to pay the penniless Frenchman's bills in London, and to assist his repatriation to his native land.

On 9 April, when the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho was featured in the *IPN*, he was still in a state of deep lethargy, although now capable of moving his extremities, and of taking nourishment. When the musician M Boichet, of the Hippodrome, played the 'Marseillaise' on the oboe to cheer up his soporific countryman, M Chauffat professed not to recognise the tune, "and seemed anything but pleased with the performance." But on 16 April, the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho was finally out of bed after his 19-day slumber: he finished his morning toilet, wrote some letters, and read about himself in the French newspapers with great interest. "The Soho Sleeper wakes up!" announced the *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* of 17 April. The Chauffat Relief Fund had enjoyed considerable success, and after all his London bills had been paid, there was still enough money to convey the patient to Paris, where Dr Charcot made sure he was taken into hospital. Eschewing patient confidentiality, this distinguished neuro-psychiatrist wrote a newspaper bulletin of his own, pooh-poohing the London doctors' great interest in the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho. M Chauffat was just an hysterical patient whose illness assumed the form of 'attacks of sleep' rather than convulsive attacks. Such cases were by no means rare in France, he pontificated: there was, at the present time, a woman at the Salpetrière Hospital who had been asleep for months.

LEFT: The house at 36 Greek Street, as it looks today.

In August 1887, M Bougeret, the hotel-keeper in Greek Street, wrote to the newspapers that the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho was still under Dr Charcot in a Paris hospital. In November 1888, M Chauffat was back in London, where he suffered another attack of catalepsy. But although his attending physician Dr Speed wrote to the *Lancet* and the London newspapers, nobody was much interested in last year's celebrity. The Sleeping Frenchman of Soho woke up after a few weeks, probably dismayed at the lack of publicity. Nothing is known about M Chauffat's later vicissitudes, but it is curious that the old hotel at 36 Greek Street, where this marathon sleeper once held court, looks virtually unchanged since 1887, although the ground floor is now an oriental restaurant. If I had been able to afford it, I would have purchased the freehold of this historic house, to live in the upper floors. In spite of the busy nightlife of these parts, it would surely have been easy to enjoy a refreshing night's sleep in the chamber vacated by the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho. The ground floor should of course be a *French* restaurant, named 'The Snoring Frog', where I would have a reserved a table to enjoy a meal of *escargots*, *grenouilles* and *homards*.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

CARL JUNG PART 3

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

SHORTLY BEFORE WORLD WAR ONE, JUNG HAD ANOTHER VISION: HE WAS SITTING AT HIS DESK ONE DAY...
WHEN...
KRACK
AAAARGH!
HE LANDED ON A SQUIDGY FLOOR...
SPLUDGE!
...WHERE HE MET A LEATHERY-SKINNED DWARF...
JUNG THEN WADED THROUGH A STREAM OF ICY WATER...
...UNTIL HE FOUND A RED CRYSTAL ON A ROCK...
HE SPIED ANOTHER RIVER, ON WHICH FLOATED A CORPSE!
A GIGANTIC BLACK SCARAB!
AND A BLAZING RED SUN!
AND THEN BLOOD BEGAN TO SPURT EVERYWHERE!!
JUST A FEW DAYS LATER, HE HAD ANOTHER VISION, IN WHICH HE SHOT THE LEGENDARY NORSE HERO SIEGFRIED DEAD!
BANG!
THESE EPIC VISIONS WERE REPLACED BY A GURU - AN EGYPTIAN GHOST CALLED PHILOMON!
JUNG'S MATURE EDUCATION BEGAN THEN...
NEXT ALCHEMY! UFOS! COINCIDENCES!

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FORTEAN TIMES 324

ON SALE 5 FEB 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A bank customer died from a massive electric shock when an ATM machine zapped him with 20,000 volts as he tried to withdraw cash in New Delhi, India. ***D.Star, 6 Aug 2014.***

Gardener Nathan Greenway, 33, died in hospital on 7 September from multiple organ failure. He became ill five days earlier, probably after brushing against the deadly flower aconite (or *aconitum*), also known as devil's helmet, monkshood, blue rocket or wolf's bane, which was growing in the grounds of Millcourt House, near Alton, Hampshire, belonging to Christopher Ogilvie Thompson. Histopathologist Asmat Mustajab informed the pre-inquest hearing in Basingstoke that it was "more likely than not" Mr Greenway, of Aldershot, died after coming into contact with the purple flowering plant, a member of the buttercup family of *ranunculaceæ*. Aconite poisoning can occur if it is ingested or handled without gloves – especially if the skin is broken. The roots are particularly toxic. In severe cases the poisoning causes vomiting, dizziness and diarrhoea, followed by palpitations, paralysis of the heart and airways, and death. Ancient hunters are said to have smeared its flowers on their arrowheads to poison their prey. It is referred to in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part II* as the "venom of suggestion" and crops up in Greek mythology. The Canadian actor André Noble died on a camping trip in 2004 after accidentally consuming the plant. *D.Telegraph, 7+8 Nov 2014.*

In a cruel twist of fate, an Australian family who lost two members – Rodney Burrows and his wife Mary – aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 on 8 March also lost two other close relatives – Maree Rizk and her husband Albert – when the same airline's Flight MH17 crashed in Ukraine on 17 July. *Irish* ***Independent, 19 July 2014.***

A poetry lover stabbed his friend to death after a dispute about whether poetry or prose was the superior literary form. In January 2014, the unnamed 53-year-old former teacher from the Urals was visiting his friend Yury Nikitkin, 66, in the town of Irbit, 1,200 miles (1,930km) east of Moscow, when they began drinking vodka and discussing literary styles. According to a spokesman for the regional investigative committee, the argument soon became heated and culminated with the verse-loving visitor stabbing his host in the chest with a kitchen knife.

"During the drinking, the two men began an argument over which literary genre is more important, poetry or prose," said the spokesman. "The owner of the home argued that prose is the real literature, while his guest insisted it was poetry." After stabbing Nikitkin, the murderer fled the scene but was arrested in a nearby village and confessed. He was sentenced to eight years in a penal colony. Ironically, residents later said that Nikitkin quite enjoyed poetry, and was prone to recalling verses at length or making theatrical declarations of love to women he met in the street.

Last year, a heated discussion on the relative merits of Kant's philosophy resulted in a man shooting another in the head with an air gun as they queued for beer at a city event in Rostov. *D.Telegraph, metro.co.uk, 25 Oct 2014.*

One-year-old Brayden King fell into a baptismal font and drowned in 33in (85cm) of water after wandering away from his 13-year-old sister during a church service at the Pentecostal House of Prayer in Alabama. How he managed to climb two flights of stairs and open a set of doors was a mystery. ***(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 27 Sept 2014.***

A 'quack' doctor who believes that water causes disease and has had at least 16 patients die from his treatment has been jailed for 15 years in Henan, central China. Hu Wanlin, 65, who claims to be an "omnipotent doctor", thinks that all diseases are caused by water and patients have to be dehydrated with a "magic medicine" using powerful salts. He had been jailed in 2000 for the same offence, but was released early and set up a "health retreat" for 12 patients last year. *D.Telegraph, 21 Nov 2014.*

A widow arrested on suspicion of killing her husband with poison had previously buried three spouses and three other partners. Chisako Kakehi, 67, from Kyoto, Japan, who has a fortune of 800 million yen (£4.3 million), is now suspected of murdering all seven men to get their assets and claim life insurance. She denies it – saying she is "doomed by fate" to watch her loved ones die. The former bank worker was arrested on 19 November 2014 after a post mortem examination showed that fourth husband Isao Kakehi had cyanide in his system just one month after their marriage in November 2013. Three months earlier, her then boyfriend was taken ill after they ate at a restaurant. In March 2012, her 71-year-old fiancé died after falling off his motorbike in Osaka. The cause death at the time was given as a heart attack, although a blood sample subsequently revealed the presence of cyanide. Kakehi's first husband died in 1994, aged 64; her second husband apparently had a stroke in 2006 and died aged 69; a third marriage ended with her husband's death in 2008. One year later, a boyfriend died from what was ascribed to cancer.

Japan has seen several "black widow" multiple murderers in recent years. In 2012, Kanae Kijima was sentenced to hang for the murders of three men, aged 41, 53 and 80, whom she met through Internet dating sites. She drugged them with sleeping tablets before burning charcoal briquettes to poison them with carbon monoxide. She is in jail awaiting the outcome of an appeal. ***dailymail.co.uk, 19 Nov; telegraph.co.uk, Metro, 20 Nov 2014.***

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18 MAR	staffordgatehousetheatre.co.uk	
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19 MAR	hertfordtheatre.com	
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20 MAR	middlesbroughtownhallonline.co.uk	
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21 MAR	hullcc.gov.uk/hullcityhall	T
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22 MAR	pyramidparrhall.co.uk	T
CARDIFF St David's Hall	02920 878 444	
25 & 26 MAR	stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk	
WEYMOUTH Pavilion	01305 783 225	
27 MAR	weymouthpavilion.com	
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